Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Peacebuilding in the Middle East

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Contents

1. Introduction

1.1.   Relevance and Theme of the Study

The conflicts in the Middle East have triggered the world´s largest humanitarian crisis since World War II. Humanitarian needs continue to rises, population displacements are increasing, and an entire generation of children has and is being exposed to war and violence, increasingly deprived of basic services, education and protection.

The Middle East consists of three great religions; Islam, Christianity and Judaism. The current and acutely tense religio-political situation is perceived as threatening to many people and religious groups. Many Christians are leaving the region.

Nowhere are the stakes of sectarian conflict as high as in the Middle East, and nowhere is the practice of interfaith dialogue more difficult. The Middle East is deeply affected by religious identities and meanings. A peace process based solely on secular values will probably not be sustainable. Several researchers recommend that the reconciliation must involve the religious believers and recognize the religiousness.

The theme of this thesis is Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Peacebuilding in the Middle East. In the following I would like to introduce the religious landscape of the Middle East with particular focus on the Christians and the Muslims. Also, I seek to understand the value of inter-religious meetings and dialogue. Moreover, my intention is to have a deepened ability to reflect on the functions of religion as resource, identity and as a power for motivation in the political and social realities of the Middle East.

Muslims and Christians have lived side by side through ages in the Middle East. What is common between Muslims and Christians lies not in something marginal. It lies, rather, in something absolutely central to both: love of God and love of neighbour. The common religious value is the basis of interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians.

Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world's population. Peaceful relations between Muslims and Christians stand as one of the central challenges of this century, and perhaps of the whole present epoch. Though tensions, conflicts, and even wars in which Christians and Muslims stand against each other are not primarily religious in character, they possess an undeniable religious dimension. If we can achieve religious peace between these two religious communities, peace in the world will clearly be easier to attain.

This study establishes that it is important to understand the collective religious history, and the focus on dialogue and interreligious understanding is necessary for creating a culture of peace in the Middle East. Muslims and Christians share the belief that God wants them to live a life full of respect for justice, peace, forgiveness and human relationships.

1.2.   Research Issues and Questions

My research questions are "In what ways could an interfaith dialogue, prove to play a positive role in addressing violations of human rights?" and "How do Muslim and Christian believers contribute to peace, forgiveness and reconciliation in the Middle East, focused on Cyprus?"

1.3.   Scope and delimitations

This thesis focuses on interfaith dialogue and religious peacebuilding in the Middle East, with particular focus on Cyprus, and describes the religious landscape of the Middle East, historical developments and the identity of Christianity and Islam as well as the circumstances of conflict, violence and co-existence in the Middle East.

The theoretical arguments are then tested against an empirical environment, which is the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process. The purpose of the Religious Track is to build relationship, understanding and trust between the religious leaders in Cyprus. The study explores the inter-religious communication in Cyprus (as a part of the Middle East), and to what extent the religious leaders can offer constructive contributions to the peace process and in particular to the complex process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The Middle East holds the distinction of being home to all three Abrahamic religions; Islam, Christianity and Judaism. This study is delimited to an interest in Islam and Christianity. There are also those two religious communities that are represented in the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process.

As in many other conflicts where groups of different faiths are on different sides, the core of the Cyprus conflict is not necessarily a religious one, even if religion plays an active role in the political and social life of the island.

Located in the north-eastern part of the Mediterranean, Cyprus is immediately connected with the Middle East. Turkey, to the north, is at the shortest distance of 65 km, and Syria in the east is at 169 km. [1] In most contexts, Cyprus is considered to belong to the region of the Middle East. The Cyprus dispute is an ongoing issue. Cyprus has been divided since 1974. Although the Republic of Cyprus is recognized as the sole legitimate state, sovereign over all the island, the north is de facto under the administration of the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The majority of Greek Cypriots identify as Greek Orthodox, whereas most Turkish Cypriots are adherents of Sunni Islam.

Throughout much of the time of writing this thesis, I was situated in Cyprus for primary reasons that are other than this research.

1.4.   Definitions

The term *interfaith dialogue* refers to cooperative, constructive and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions and faith, at both the individual and

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[1] Utrikespolitiska Institutet, Länder i fickformat nr 406 Cypern, Utrikespolitiska Institutet, Landguiden Cypern

institutional levels. Increased awareness of religious plurality, the potential role of religion in conflict, and the growing place of religion in public life present urgent challenges that require greater understanding and cooperation among people of diverse faiths to increase acceptance of others and to better understand their identity. Such interfaith dialogue can take a wide variety of forms, ranging from joint appeals by high-level religious leaders, to attempts to develop mutual understanding and the recognition of shared values and interests, to grassroots efforts to encourage repentance and promote reconciliation. [2]

Religious peacebuilding is a term used to "describe the range of activities performed by religious actors and institutions for the purpose of resolving and transforming deadly conflict, with the goal of building social relations and political institutions characterized by an ethos of tolerance and nonviolence". [3] Religious peacebuilding includes, the beliefs, norms, and rituals that pertain to peacebuilding, as well as a range of actors for whom religion is a significant motivation for their peacebuilding. [4]

The term *religious leader* describes the official religious leadership in a religion. They are also the keepers of religious tradition and often take on the role of moral leader as well as teacher or guide. They perform the rites and ceremonies that a particular religion requires. And are also often involved in political decisions in the Middle East.

The *Middle East* is in European concept, defined geographically as a transcontinental region centred on Western Asia, Cyprus, Turkey (Southeast Europe), and Egypt (Northeast Africa). Cyprus has always been a crossing point for cultures and religion in the Middle East. In this research a few countries in North Africa have also been mentioned.

1.5.   Structure of the Study

The method used for this master thesis is three-fold. The main part consists of a desk-study, there I read and analysed various kinds of literature, reports and other documents. The desk-study is supported by a number of interviews with key people and even some field visits.

I have used qualitative methods including semi-structured interviews, participant observations and qualitative text analysis. An essential part of my research is the literature review.

My study consists of two sections. Firstly, by introducing the religious landscape of the Middle East, I clarify the historical development and identity of Christianity and Islam, and discuss the circumstances of conflict, violence and co-existence in the Middle East. In the second section, I study interfaith dialogue and religious peacebuilding, and how this can be used in the Middle East. I also clarify the peace-making force in religion and its partnership with human rights.

The particularity of this study is related to its focus on the Middle East conflict, and the specific relationship between religious peace activism and its ability to promote peace. The

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[2] Greenebaum; Practical Interfaith p. 4,17-20, Smock; Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding p.viii,16-21
[3] Little, Appleby; A moment of Opportunity? p.5
[4] Philpott, Powers; Strategies of Peace p.322

methodological considerations behind this study have been guided by an interest in how the religious potential in peace work is activated. I have selected an organisation, Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, as an example of an organisation that is building inter-faith understanding.

1.6. Field Visits

As a starting point of my work with the following thesis, I visited, in February, the refugee camps in Lebanon and in March, Israel/Palestine. These two contexts are examples of how people are suffering because of conflicts in the Middle East. A report on the field visits is provided in an appendix.

2. Methodology

2.1. Theoretical and Methodological reflections

I hope this Master thesis work will contribute to social change and have an impact on others. If that should be the case, I think it is important that the data is credible, the research approach is clear and transparent and that this Master thesis is comprehensive and fair. Careful attention has been paid to ensure the integrity and the reliability of this Master thesis work.

2.1.1. Some problems and priorities in working with this Master thesis

It is realized that different theoretical and methodological approaches are helpful in order to organize, analyse and evaluate the research work in an efficient way. It is a way of talking about and understanding the world. In the below text, I will repeatedly stress the importance of *research ethics*. To be efficient in my research as well as meet the key characteristic requirements mentioned below, I have used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Participatory Action Research (PAR). In CDA I used a combination of tools to analyse power relations in society, for reflecting and constructing the social world.[5] In PAR I focused on dialogue, interviewing, storytelling, surveys and collective action, and stressed equal relationship and ensured collaboration.[6] The framing of research questions were based on critical social thinking.[7]

Discourse Analysis and Participatory Action Research will contribute to *social awareness*. One of the priorities in working with this Master thesis is to show the importance of the role of religion and its ability to influence the peace process. It has been a challenge to not have any preconceived ideas. I hope my work will build relationships of respect and trust with

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[5] Jörgensen/Philips, Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method, chapter 1 and 3
[6] Kindon/Pain/Kesby, Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods, chapter 2, etc.
[7] Alvesson/Sköldberg, Reflexive Methodology, chapter 5

people of different religions so as to facilitate deeper mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation for the common good.

Social research has the ambition of getting behind people´s everyday understanding and has a critical approach to taken-for-granted *knowledge*. The religion-affecting role is well known. I recognize that religion has political significance but I have tried to assure in my research that all sensitive matters are treated in an objective and sober spirit, steering away from slander and provocation, striving to be an instrument of social harmony and mutual respect. Research and action must be done together with people and not for people. The researcher shows respect and combines their skills with the knowledge of the researched. Self-reflection and transparency can help. [8]

I also think it is important to consider the research participants´ *involvement/participation* throughout the process. One of the challenges could be to consider the community in the Middle East as a diverse group. I do not believe that attacking any religion in the Middle East will lead its believers to learn how to better respect Western values of democracy, open debate and personal and press freedoms. My research is committed to enabling people to share in the processes of making decisions that affect them. Engagement between researcher and research participant is of importance to avoid that the research is affected by the researcher´s western values. Participatory Action Research has been useful in removing barriers to more collaborative and community-based resource management. [9]

Respect and *trust* are of importance in all research approaches, to seek to identify with those to whom one relates and to their needs and aspirations, to be able to step into the participants´ shoes, to try to understand the situation as well as to be objective. I recognise the many cultural, ethnic and religious differences that exist in the Middle East. My research is committed to social transformation through mutual understanding and respect. According to PAR, the researcher and the participant are partners and share what has been learned. There should be no room for interpretation. The approach I used was to not see those who participated in the research just as an "object" of study. [10]

It is realized that the *language* is important to convey the message in a fair way. The used language needs to be understood by everyone, not only by the person who is an expert. The message can be strengthened and clarified by *visual* communication. I hope I have achieved demonstrably high quality results and been able to present the result in a narrative report (including text analysis using CDA; [11] supported by charts, diagrams, and photos. [12])
The *power* of religion to change lives and preserve structures lies in their ability to build long-term relationships. The same applies for the research as theory and method. I recognize that to attack other people in order to promote own ideas and values is unproductive and causes unnecessary offence. Productive power and knowledge have consequences for the conception of reality. I have used CDA as a "critical" approach and aimed to contribute to social change by using equal power relations in communication processes [13] and hopefully managed to identify power inequalities by carefully document my research work.[14]

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[8] Jörgensen/Phillips, Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method
[9] Kindon/Pain/Kesby, Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods, chapter 8 and 10
[10] Kindon/Pain/Kesby, Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods, chapter 5 and 6
[11] Jörgensen/Phillips, Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method, chapter 3
[12] Kindon/Pain/Kesby, Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods, chapter 14, 18 and 19
[13] Jörgensen/Phillips, Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method, chapter 1 and 3
[14] Coles, Doing Documentary work

2.1.2. A presentation of my working process

I have the advantage of finding myself in an environment with people who have long experience in the Middle East. I have utilized the skills and experience available and collected information from people with extensive expertise and experience.

I think a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques can enrich one another. However, qualitative approach has been most useful in my research. To create credibility to my research, I have used some statistics to assess trends, strengthen the message, refer to as back-up information, explain relationships, analysing data, etc. [15]

By using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Action Research I have been able to organize, structure, and systematize this Master thesis work in an efficient manner. These methods/techniques contain a set of tools that were valuable in my working process. I have reviewed all the information given, examined the area of interest and identified the issues. [16]

The action research steps were very useful in order to structure my working process. It helped me to make a plan for data collection, to collect, analyse and organize the data, to review relevant literature, to describe how findings can be used and applied, to report the findings, make the conclusions and recommendations, and create an action plan. [17]

As I already mentioned, I have used my network when I collected and analysed the data, but this will not be enough. A *literature review* is necessary [18]. The insight of others will make my research more efficient. The CDA has helped me understand the quoting of verbs, verbs processes, languages and images. [19] Other useful Action Research steps were *data analysis* [20] and *evaluate qualitative research* [21]. I have also used the tools Action Research to provide related data collection [22] and quantitative research [23].

2.2.   A Qualitative Research

The theme of this thesis is Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Peacebuilding in the Middle East. In the following, I would like to introduce the religious landscape of the Middle East with particular focus on the Christians and the Muslims. Also, I seek to understand the value of inter-religious meetings and dialogue. Moreover, my intention is to have a deepened ability to reflect on the functions of religion as resource, identity and as a power for motivation in the political and social realities of the Middle East.

This Master Thesis is a qualitative research which seeks to understand how Muslim and Christian believers contribute to peace, forgiveness and reconciliation in the Middle East.

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[15] White, Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches in Poverty Analysis
[16] Machin/Mayr; How to do Critical Discourse Analysis, Johnson; A short guide to Action Research
[17] Johnson; A short guide to Action Research, chapter 2 and 4
[18] Johnson; A short guide to Action Research, chapter 5
[19] Machin/Mayr; How to do Critical Discourse Analysis, chapter 3-8
[20] Johnson; A short guide to Action Research, chapter 7
[21] Johnson; A short guide to Action Research, chapter 9
[22] Johnson; A short guide to Action Research, chapter 6
[23] Johnson; A short guide to Action Research, chapter 8

My research question, as earlier stated, is "In what ways could an interfaith dialogue prove to play a positive role in addressing violations of human rights?" and "How do Muslim and Christian believers contribute to peace, forgiveness and reconciliation in the Middle East, focused on Cyprus?"

Please find below some further questions to consider;

What theoretical foundations seem to shape the practices? What subjects or topics would peacebuilders like to see addressed? What do peacebuilder think is the best method for introducing and implementing strategies? What strategy is most effective?

I have started with the situation analysis, continued with the literature review and finally examined and analysed.

The thesis is very much on examining the role that religion plays in the Middle East and on issues such as building inter-faith understanding, etc. The research gained most from using a qualitative approach. I have read the existing written documentation and searched for words such as inter-faith dialogue, Middle East, peacebuilding, reconciliation, etc. I also used the network of contacts I have in the Middle East.

The study of the organisations Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process primarily rests on written documents by the organisation, news articles, and interviews with leading personnel of this organisation. The starting point for the sampling of data was to go through all the written documents published by the organisation. In addition, I found news articles, video clips, etc via the internet. I conducted interviews with the leaders of the organisation after reading through their documents. The interviews were open, and structured thematically around the research questions. The interviews were conducted between February and May and partly tape-recorded.

Moreover, I have made several trips to various countries in the Middle East to gain an understanding of the situation in the region.

In February I visited the refugee camps in the Bekaa valley in Lebanon.

In March I attended an international conference in Bethlehem, held by the Bethlehem Bible College. The theme of the conference was Christ at the Checkpoint 4 - The Gospel in the face of Religious extremism.

In April I attended an international conference in Nicosia, Cyprus, held by the SAT-7 International.

During my research period I have made visits to Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt and Cyprus.

In the following I discuss the *considerations* behind my choice of *analytical* models. This is my research plan.

2.3.   Research Plan

Qualitative research looks at the environment as it is and uses systematic methods to understand things happening there. The steps of my research process include identifying the problem and examining the area of interest, making a plan for data collection, collecting, analysing and organising data, reviewing relevant literature, describing how findings can be used, applied and finally reporting the findings, making the conclusions and recommendations and creating an action plan.

Action research is used to define problems and to develop solutions. In starting my project, I first found a topic and then created a question related to this topic. It does not mean I have to prove something. It is often to find out what´s going on. I did not start with an answer, as I did not know what I am going to find. The research will hopefully help to make sound decisions. The goal is to understand, analyse and evaluate.

The next step was to set the research topic in a theoretical context. My *literature review* was to look in academic journals, books and web sources to learn more about my research topic. Relating my research topic to current theories gives more credibility and provides a theoretical context for my findings. Additionally, the insights of others made my research more efficient. The desk-study has been supported by interviews and discussions with my network. Moreover, I met some of the writers at the conference in Bethlehem and had the opportunity to ask follow-up questions.

I did most of my literature review before I began collecting data. The review is used to help formulate the research questions and refine a pedagogical method to be studied. I believe a thorough review of the literature guided me in all phases of my research. The process started with locating possible sources. It was important that both Muslim and Christian writers were represented. I used different key word terms and searched in database systems. I have spent a lot of time in this phase, and carried it out as thoroughly as possible. After I getting a pile of books and journals I spent some hours to see whether my sources provided information related to my questions. I looked at the table of contents and the index and skimmed a few chapters in the books. For journal articles, I scanned the headings, subheadings, and final paragraphs.

When I went through all the provided information, I definitely wanted to take notes. Although this was time consuming initially, I think, it made the writing process much more efficient in the long term. Once I had my notes, the next step was to look for themes. Any source used is referenced fully.

There is a wide variety of *data* that is *collected.* This is done in a systematic way. I used a checklist, including dates, types, etc. The data was collected from different places and in different ways over time.

Another useful method was *data analysis*. I analysed and organized the collected data by noticing recurring items, themes, categories or patterns that emerge. It is of importance that the data create a true and fair picture to be able to understand fully all aspects of what I am observing. I found triangulation as an essential part of establishing credibility to my research. This means I collected different types of data, used more than one form of data sources and looked at something from more than one perspective. The topic I am writing about may be sensitive, and it is important that the data is credible. If a study can be repeated with similar

results, it is likely that it will be reliable. This enables me and others to use the data with confidence. My intention is to be as objective as possible in describing and interpreting what I see, so I will record my observations carefully.

To e*valuate qualitative research* enables me to select the best research studies to use and to better understand a bit of the reality. I have clearly defined the area of study and ensured that all questions could be answered by qualitative types of data. It is important to describe any preconceived values or beliefs that may influence the research. As a researcher, I would not start with an answer, but try to have an open mind-set. The qualitative research will also be evaluated by considering all relevant aspects of the environments, coherence, persuasiveness and consensus.

My research report leads up to a section in which I discuss my findings and make my conclusions and recommendations based on the data collected. After reporting conclusion and recommendations, I like to evaluate the effectiveness of my study, explain particular aspects of it, or describe how I might do it differently next time.

3. Religion, History, Identity and Inter-faith dialogue – how to contribute to Peace, Forgiveness and Reconciliation?

3.1. Religious Landscape of the Middle East

In this first section, by introducing the religious landscape of the Middle East, I clarify the historical development and identity of Christianity and Islam, and discuss the circumstances of conflict, violence and co-existence in the Middle East.

It is of importance to understand the collective religious history. The religious context can generally provide a perspective from which to view the world, opportunities to socialize with a spectrum of individuals from different generations, and a set of basic principles to live by. These foundations can shape an individual's identity.

Each party in an interfaith dialogue has to take into account the other party´s culture, values, history of their civilization, and mind set, to show understanding of its overall position.

3.1.1. Outlook on the Current Situation

The Middle East is deeply affected by religious identities and meanings. The Middle East holds the distinction of being home to all three Abrahamic traditions; Islam, Christianity and Judaism. The world's two largest faiths, Christianity and Islam, make up almost half the world's population and face official and social hostility in many countries. However, social hostility is not always possible to determine the degree to which it is religiously motivated or state sponsored. The religious profile of the world is rapidly changing among the world´s major religions. If current trends continue, Islam will grow faster than any other religion. Islam, however, is already the most represented religion in the Middle East through different "branches".

People of different religious belonging have lived side by side through the ages, sometimes in harmony and sometimes in conflict. The Abrahamic faiths share common frameworks and a belief that their faith is rooted in a historical tradition (and this is one of the problems when it comes to sharing holy sites, etc). All three religions share the belief that God wants them to live a life full of respect for justice, peace, forgiveness and human relationships. The Middle East has been characterized by a history of organic mixing of politics and religion.

Although Christianity was spread all over the whole world, the Middle East is still the place where Christian pilgrims around the world come to visit holy sites. It is also from this region that Islam spread out to the whole world and it is still the place where all Muslims come to observe their religious duty of pilgrimage.

The total population of the Middle East is approximately 400 million and almost half of the citizens are under the age of fifteen. [24]

The Middle East region is greatly blessed with human and material resources. The region´s communities, however, are being decimated and depressed. Christians are emigrating more rapidly than Muslims.

The dominant religion in the Middle East is Islam, compromising approximately 93% of the total population. The majority Sunni Islam make up 77% of the whole. The minority Shiites make up 15%, although they are the majority in Iran (90%), Iraq (60%) and Bahrain (75%). The Christians are 4% of the total population. [25]

The region´s various Christian groups include many different Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox (Armenians, Copts, Syrians, etc), Catholic, and Evangelical traditions. It is a journey to the area where it all began. A study of the situation of Christians on a country-by-country basis enriches the understanding of the faith. [26]

Cyprus is considered to belong to the region of the Middle East. The majority of Greek Cypriots identify as Greek Orthodox, whereas most Turkish Cypriots are officially Sunni Islam.

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[24] The World Factbook, Central Intelligence Agency, Washington, D.C, 2015 World Population Data Sheet, Population Reference Bureau

[25] World Christian Database. Online; www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd, Pew Research Center Religion and Public life; Online; www.pewforum.org

[26] Bailey & Bailey; Who are the Christians in the Middle East?, chapter 3

A map of the Middle East and North Africa (Cyprus is marked with a red box)   A map of the Middle East

Thus, the Middle East is a constantly changing region where many religions aspire for their roots.

3.1.2. Historical Development and Identity of Christianity

Analysing the global history of Christianity, from the fifth century to the twentieth, I realize that the first global Christian establishment persisted for a thousand years. According to a study by Philip Jenkins, the predominant churches were Nestorian and Jacobites, and the Christianity´s center was in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. [27] Interestingly, for centuries, they got along well with neighbouring faiths, especially Islam. These churches and their leaders ruled the Middle East for centuries, were most influential and became the administrators and academics in the new Muslim empire.

Today, the presence of the Christian tradition has been weakened in its cradle, the Middle East. They held the closest historical links to the early church and were the dominant expression of Christianity throughout its first millennium. The pressure of invaders into Islamic-ruled lands, from the East (Mongols and Turks) and from the West (the Crusades), and the fact that Christians often allied with those invaders, eventually provoked savage reaction from Muslims. Secular politics announce the death of Nestorian-Jacobites. Jenkins explains that understanding the fallen churches tells us about the history of Christianity and its interaction with other faiths. [28]

Churches in the Middle East are deeply rooted in the religious, social, cultural and political realities in the region. Today they are divided into four major ecclesiastical families; Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical. The Christian churches today are in a state of division, and holds different Christological views. The long history of Christian existence in the Middle East offers a more relative perspective on things. The difficult phases throughout history have never been terminal. Many factors that influenced the situation of

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[27] Jenkins; The Lost History of Christianity, p. 6, 56, 57
[28] Jenkins; The Lost History of Christianity, p. 39

Christians in the Middle East have played a role in the continued presence of Christians in the East. [29]

Additionally, rather than asking why the presence of the Christian tradition has been weakened, I think, we should seek to know how the Christian tradition survive, in seemingly impossible circumstances. The Middle Eastern Christians is particularly impressive in this respect, as they still make up some percent of the region´s population. From several centuries, Islam has been the dominant faith in the Middle East. Full membership of society is open only to Muslims. I think we have much to learn about the Middle Eastern Christians´ adaptability in the face of dominant languages and cultures, their ability to learn the new language of power without giving up their traditions. Jenkins argues that the churches certainly did reach the hearts of their natives. [30]

It seems that the development of Islam can only be understood in the context of centuries of close contact with Eastern Christianity. The linkage between the two religions goes far. Might Islam fulfil a positive role, one that complements but does not replace the Christian message. Based on Jenkins´ study, I believe that it is important to recover memories and restore the history, able to view our world today, including the current conflicts in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Without this lost history, we lack an important element for understanding the collective religious history. [31]

3.1.3. Historical Development and Identity of Islam

In Islam, Muslims have looked for God in history. Their sacred scripture, the Qur´an, gave them a historical mission to create a just community in which all members, even the most vulnerable, were treated with respect. The prophet Mohammed´s concern with the poor sets the tone for a culture that values community as a manifestation of God. Several academics has pointed out that a Muslim had to redeem history, which means that the political well-being of the Muslim community was the stuff of religion itself. Every effort had to be expanded to put Islamic history back on track, or life would be drained of meaning. Politics enabled the divine to function. [32]

The history of the Islamic world, from the time of Mohammed to the fall of the Ottoman Empire and beyond, helps to understand the conflicts of today, such as the wars in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, the Palestinian/Israeli conflict and the 9/11. In dialogues where the different religious traditions are adversaries, the potential for clashes resulting from differences in power is greater. Conducting a dialogue between Muslims and Christians during such a volatile time in history will require careful balancing of power dynamics. A power differential exists between different groups.

According to the Islamic theology and law, Jews and Christians have a unique status. The Qur´an refers to them as "People of the Book". The Qur´an recognizes a true believer as a

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[29] Badr; Christianity – A History in the Middle East, p.38-43, 895
[30] Jenkins; The Lost History of Christianity, p. 138, 214, 42, 230, Gunner; Mellanösterns religiösa minoriteter
[31] Jenkins; The Lost History of Christianity, p. 258, 262, Horner; A guide to Christian Churches in the Middle East
[32] Armstrong; Islam – A short history, p.xii, 186, Küng; Islam - Past, Present and Future, Wiktorowicz,; Islamic activism; a social movement theory approach

person who believes in the oneness of God, without associating anything or anyone with him. There are many verses in the Qur´an that advocate freedom of religion and clearly prohibit forcing non-Muslims to become Muslims. [33]

Based on the writings of Abu-Nimer, a major call of Islamic religion is to establish a just social reality. Thus, any act from Muslims should be evaluated in terms of its potential contribution to that end. Islamic non-violent and peace-building cultural and religious values are powerful means of mobilizing people in social and political movements. [34] Qur´an is promoting diversity and pluralism. Throughout Islam´s history, civilization has lived in accordance with a belief in mutual impact between various civilizations. [35]

Wherever prophet Mohammed took over, he instructed people to live in peace with one another, and the values that Muslims said they were bringing to the world is fellowship, fairness, harmony, democratic participation, equality and compassion. Following Tamim Ansary´s study, the conflict wrecking the modern world is not best understood as a "clash of civilizations", but the friction generated by two mismatched world histories intersecting. [36]

According to Ansary, Islam is a religion but also a social project, an idea of how politics and the economy ought to be managed. Islam can be seen as one world history among many, and includes many characters who are not Muslim and many events that are not religious. It is vast complex of communal purposes moving through time. And so is the West. They are all the real history of the world. The challenge is to build a universal human community situated within a single shared history. [37]

3.1.4. Conflict, violence and co-existence in the Middle East

A study by Isak Svensson at Uppsala University´s Department Peace and Conflict Research, suggests that although religion is a factor in a number of conflicts, it is rarely a primary or exclusive factor. Svensson reports on the incidence of four types of conflicts from 1989 to 2003. In sum he found that only 22 percent of conflicts involve religious claims. [38]

The circumstances of our own time tend to make people feel that only in the Muslim case, holy war can be considered as an element in present conflicts, but if you look at the religious framework and the political and social history, it is clear that crusading has had a much longer afterlife than is generally thought. It is easy to misrepresent the reality of the politics that concern holy war. There might be a tendency to exaggerate the issues.[39]

The unknown makes the relations between societies more difficult than they would be if you try to understand the past. For several centuries the Muslims and Christians accepted the holy

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[33] Ahlstrand, Gunner; Non-Muslims in Muslim majority societies, p. 7-15

[34] Abu-Nimer; Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam, p.49, 184

[35] Abu-Nimer, Augsburger; Peace-Building by, between, and beyond Muslims and Evangelical Christians, p.276, 152, Brown; A new Introduction to Islam

[36] Ansary; Destiny Disrupted – A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes, p.29, 47, 353

[37] Ansary; Destiny Disrupted – A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes, p.356-357

[38] Svensson; Fighting with Faith; Religion and Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars

[39] Svensson; Ending Holy Wars – Religion and Conflict resolution in Civil wars

war as a religious duty.[40] According to the theory of Peter Partner, holy war is an area where religion, morality and the search for political advantage all intersect. God´s war has influenced Western societies, especially in their attitudes to colonialism. Jihad is an important religious duty for Muslims, i.e. to struggle and to strive. The study put the jihad of the East and the crusade of the West in their historical context. Based on Partner, I have come to understand that we need to view different situations in their own context in a sensitive way, and not allow war propaganda to affect our judgements today. The clash of civilisations between Eastern and Western cultures needs to be considered.

Religious war as opposed to a secular war is the result of the Western concept of the separation of Church and State. No such division has ever existed in the Islamic world, therefore it can´t be a real division between wars that are "religious" from such that are "non-religious".

Political Islam and democracy mean different things in different contexts, so in this area it is not possible to apply the research framework on individual countries throughout the Middle East. In some countries the goal of political Islam is to establish a Muslim religious state. In such a state Christians would be no better than second-class citizens. At the same time, there still remains the notion of Islam as both religious and secular authority, without the same political goals.

I learned from my studies that the Crusades planted in Muslims the seeds of suspicion and doubt against Christians, and pictured Arab Christians as agents of the West.

Both the Bible and the Qur´an, give a basis for interaction and dialogue.

While the Bible reports violence in the past, some argue that the Qur´an commands violence here and now. According to my study, such a contrast is false. To say that terrorists can find religious texts to justify their acts does not mean that their violence actually grows from those roots. To hate and fear other religions and races is in the Bible, and all occur with a far greater frequency than in the Qur´an. The Bible is a building of many stories, the Qur´an is a work of its time. [41]

If Christians read the whole Bible, without compromise, Jenkins argues that Christians cannot engage with neighbours and critics of other traditions, nor enjoy their own faith until they confront the text of terror in their heritage. Without the Old Testament, all of it, the New Testament becomes a tree without a trunk. There is a need of a process of truth and reconciliation, and a full understanding of the Bible. This will hopefully give Christians credibility. Jenkins also points out that if the circumstances in which people live make them to seek justification for violence, then they will find them in the Bible as well as in the Qur´an, but if they don´t need them, they won´t find them. "Religious violence" may be religious in its character, but its origins need to be found in places other than the basic texts of the faith. [42]

According to Anthony Pagden, the conflicts between East and West, from the classical times to the conflicts of today, have formed the West´s vision of itself as independent, free, secular

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[40] Partner; God of Battles – Holy Wars of Christianity and Islam, p.133
[41] Jenkins, Laying Down the Sword – Why We Can´t Ignore the Bible´s Violent Verses, p.10,12,71,94
[42] Jenkins, Laying Down the Sword – Why We Can´t Ignore the Bible´s Violent Verses, p.225,26,244,252

and now democratic. On the other hand, in the East, religion and society are intertwined with each other. In this way, it is a discussion about the global battle of the secular against the sacred. Terrorism and war will presumably continue as long as sacred and secular remain confused in the minds of so many.

We live today in a global world. Religion has not quietly died, but it is certainly no longer the cause of the bitter battles it once was. Over time, the people of East and West do not only live in different regions of the world but also holding different views on how best to live their lives. The common identity in East and in West has changed radically from antiquity to the present. East and West are separated more by values and culture than by anything else.

It seems unlikely that the long struggle between East and West is going to end soon. Pagden emphasizes that the battle lines are very much in the self-same corner of the world as it was twenty-three centuries ago. [43]

Arab Christianity has survived Muslim dominance in the Middle East. There were Arabs who could be described as Christian, centuries before the existence of the Islamic faith. There has been a Christian Arabism and an Arab Christianity. The Muslim dominance of Arabness, however, from the beginning brought a tension into that Arab Christian existence under which it has laboured and survived. [44]

Christian Arabs have become second ranked inhabitants in several countries in the Middle East. They are minorities who would wish to keep their unique identity and seek equality with majority. It is difficult to fully understand the complexities of Christian-Muslim relations in the Middle East and the struggle of Christians to establish an Arab identity. The theological issues interact with political, cultural, and historical events.

Based on the writings of Kenneth Cragg, I believe that Muslims and Christians can find a common destiny in the Middle East. Christian faith should never be deterred from living in hope of opportunity. The disparity about divine greatness, Cragg argues, is central to the Muslim-Christian relation, and uniquely so to Arab Christians. Only God is God. For Muslims and Christians alike, the sense of humanity over nature and of nature for humanity, and both under God, mean a sacramental universe. [45]

The Christians in the Arab world may choose to respond to these challenges in different ways. One could be to resign and give up the idea of trying to be part of a coherent Arab society. Another is to preserve the Middle Eastern Christians´ exclusivity and to manifest tribal solidarity. And another is to struggle to live within the various tensions of their society, within Christianity itself as a minority in Arab East, whose culture is defined by Islam.

Christians of this region are neither alone nor isolated but are part of a larger community. Within the Middle East, the future of the church is to live within an environment dominated by Muslims. Therefore, engaging in Muslim-Christian dialogue is one of the basic choices Christians must make to assure their future. It is recognition of human, national, and spiritual

[43] Pagden; Worlds at War: The 2,500 – Year Struggle Between East and West, p.462
[44] Bin Talal; Christianity in the Arab World
[45] Cragg; Arab Christian – A History in the Middle East, p.281, 287

kinship. To build the Church of the Arabs is a call for unity in diversity. The Church is to incarnate the faith through a sense of belonging to Arab culture.

The agenda must be to build a society within which all citizens may find opportunity and freedom to engage in building a common future. The priority must be to integrate fully into society. The worry is for the future of the Arab world, Christians and Muslims together, in justice and peace.

Relations between communities have sometimes been marred by tension and fear. For many communities, this tension confirms the need to protect their individual identities. Religion speaks for some of the deepest feelings and sensitivities of individuals and communities as well as carries profound historical memories. Religion is sometimes seen as the cause of conflict, while it is in fact more likely to be an intensifier of conflict.

As presented in this section 3.1, even though Islamic and Christian traditions encompass different perspectives, there are some core values and principles that underline the understanding of peace and conflict resolution practices. Thus even if the multi-religious landscape of the Middle East is complex there has been a fair coexistence over the years. In modern times the concept of inter-faith dialogue and religious peacebuilding have been introduced. This is the topic of the next chapter, section 3.2.

3.2. Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Peacebuilding in the Middle East

The objective of this thesis is to study interfaith dialogue and religious peacebuilding in the Middle East, and by describing the religious landscape in the Middle East as well as clarify the historical development and the identity of Christianity and Islam, I have laid a foundation for the rest of the study. With this in mind, I think, the reader better understands the circumstances of conflict, violence and co-existence in the Middle East.

In the second section of my study, I study interfaith dialogue and religious peacebuilding and how this can be used in the Middle East. I also clarify the peace-making force in religion and its partnership with human rights.

My intention is to have a deepened ability to reflect on the functions of religion as resource, identity and as a power for motivation in the political and social realities of the Middle East.

3.2.1. Outlook on the Current Situation

The Arab Spring raised the expectations of people across the Middle East and North Africa for a better personal, economic, social and political future. The expectations were high for new freedoms and prosperity across much of the Arab World. Five years on, these expectations have been frustrating and disappointing.

The Middle East and North Africa region continues to face multiple and complex emergency situations on an unprecedented scale. Across the region, sectarianism has been linked to the

battle for power, resources and territory. This region is also one of origin, destination and transit of refugees and migrants. [46]

The conflict in *Syria* and the suffering of the Syrian people is showing no sign of abating. The scale of the tragedy, having killed 250,000 men, women and children, displaced 7.6 million inside the country and sent over 4.7 million fleeing into neighbouring and other countries, is now the world's largest humanitarian disaster, with no parallel in recent history. [47]

The humanitarian needs increase as the refugee and internally displaced persons (IDPs) numbers increase. Civilians continue to be the primary victims of the conflict. Tens of thousands of civilians across Syria, including children, have been forced to endure a life of hardship under siege. Rape and sexual violence, enforced disappearances, forcible displacement, recruitment of child soldiers, summary executions and deliberate shelling of civilian targets have become commonplace.

Source: UNHCR http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php
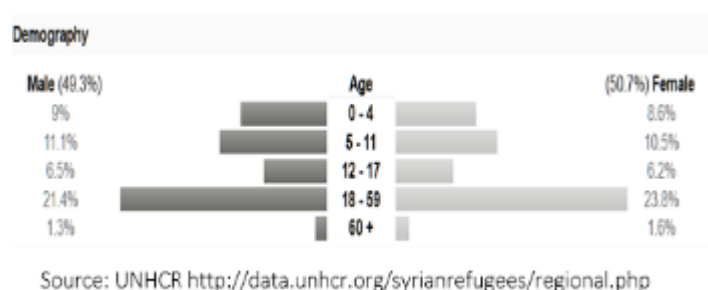
With 51.9% of refugees being under the age of 18, an entire generation of children is being exposed to war and violence, increasingly deprived of basic services, education and protection.

The aftermath of the 2003 invasion in *Iraq*, led to sectarian strife that claimed tens of thousands of lives. The deteriorating security situation and armed conflict in some areas have triggered new waves of internal displacement. Sunni Muslims feel marginalised by the Shi´a led government.

The security situation in *Libya* is increasingly volatile, and has not yet managed to bring together the rebel forces that overthrew Kaddafi who remain divided along ethnic lines, with much of the country under no central authority.

Yemen continues to face a complex humanitarian situation characterized by ongoing insecurity, localized conflicts, water scarcity and the extreme poverty of growing numbers of the population.

Egypt, the most populous of the Arab states, is still adjusting to the aftermath of the 2011 revolution with the military-backed president cracking down on the Islamists´ power. Coptic Christian minority is identified as supporters of the old regime and targeted by Islamist extremists. Egypt has the highest number of Christian in the region.

Jordan and *Lebanon* have housed millions of refugees fleeing their neighbouring homelands.

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[46] UNHCR Middle East and North Africa http://www.unhcr.org
[47] EU Council Conclusion on Syria 12 October 2015

Christians have deep roots in *Palestine* and *Israel.*

Tunisia, where the Arab spring began so hopefully, has also experimented with and been disappointed by political Islam, but managed to make adjustments with less violence.

The legal system in *Saudi Arabia* is based on Islamic law (influenced by the Wahabi tradition). Islam is the official religion and the law requires that all citizens be Muslim. The public practice of non-Muslim religions is prohibited. The government does not provide legal protection for freedom of religion. [48]

But all this chaos, including the ongoing unrest in *Morocco, The Gulf States*, *Turkey* and even *North and South Sudan* is not just the random outcome of people coming out onto the streets to express their desire for greater personal freedoms, demanding to be treated with dignity. Behind most of these events are regional agendas and huge amounts of cash being invested in the overthrow of rival regimes. [49]

The *Cyprus* dispute is an ongoing issue. Religion is one of the victims in this political conflict of nearly five decades. The division of the island between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots making the situation of human rights in Cyprus unsatisfactory.

In most of the countries in the Middle East, different religious communities are locked in deadly violent conflict that has led to deep separations between the communities. In countries like Lebanon, Palestine and Israel there is competition among the various religious groups over political power. In Egypt, the conflict between Muslims and Copts surfaces through intercommunal attacks. [50]

There is the split between Shi'a and Sunni populations, with Iran on one side and the Gulf States on the other. It is this rivalry that is aggravating the current conflicts in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria (the Assad family is Alawite, a sect of Shi'a Islam). It is also fuelling social discontent in Bahrain (a Sunni monarchy with a Shi'a majority) and the Eastern Provinces of Saudi Arabia. Then there are the splits within the Gulf States themselves, with Qatar funding the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Al-Qaida affiliated forces of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Saudi funding the more moderate rebels in Syria, some of whom are now in open conflict with the ISIS. [51]

Then there are also the broader ideological differences across the region between those who want to see Islam as the primary or only source of law across the region, and those who want a more non-sectarian democratic type of national constitution.

There is a great Christian emigration from the Middle East. They have been caught up in the conflicts and street violence. But being from a minority with no organised militia, they have often been a soft target for different sides and have especially suffered from those Islamists who want to see an end to any Christian presence in such countries. This has fuelled the drain of Christians from the region – something that has been going on since the 1950's (and earlier if we want to include the Armenian massacres after World War I). The number of Christians

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[48] Ahlstrand, Gunner; Non-Muslims in Muslim majority societies, p. 40-45
[49] Ascott; "Three Years after the Arab Spring", 2014
[50] Abu-Nimer, Khoury, Welty; Unity in Diversity – Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East, p.208-209
[51] Ascott; "Three Years after the Arab Spring", 2014

in Iraq, for instance, has dropped from about 1.2 million from the time Sadam Hussein fell to less than 300,000 today – with many of these being internally displaced. Some commentators are beginning to wonder if there will be any Christians left in some Arab countries by the end of the next decade. [52]

3.2.2. Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East

The Middle East is deeply affected by religious identities and meanings. A peace process based solely on secular values will probably not be sustainable. According to the writings of several academics, the reconciliation must involve the religious believers and recognize the religiousness.

An empirical research was published in 2007 called Unity in Diversity – Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East, where interfaith dialogue was studied in Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan. The study demonstrates the desire for interfaith dialogue in polarized societies, and confirm that religion can be a source of peace instead of war and violence.

Following the study of Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty, interfaith dialogue contributes toward conflict resolution because its concept of *reconciliation*, involves processes of confession, repentance, mercy, and forgiveness. These processes are drawing on religious resources as the basis for dialogue. Millions of residents in the Middle East are motivated largely by religion. Bringing religion into the dialogue allows the participants to engage in the process, with their religious identity as their primary point of reference. [53]

In times of conflict, religious believers from different faiths often find that they have more in common with one another than they have with non-religious people from their own background. Interfaith dialogue requires individuals to meet as equals in a process of giving and receiving information. The discourse of "peaceful coexistence" between people from the different Abrahamic religions has always been integral to life in the Middle East.

Abu-Nimer, Khoury, Welty suggest the following ground rules for making an interfaith dialogue as effective as possible. [54]
All participants should;
- be willing to share their views in the context of their own life story, and not presume to speak for the entire religious tradition
- recognize the complexities and varieties of the other faiths
- stand firmly in their own faith while remaining self-critical and open to new perspectives
- undertake a realistic view of their faith, and not focus on "defence" against others
- be considered to have equal status and importance
- commit to some basic ground rules for the meeting.

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[52] Ascott; "Three Years after the Arab Spring", 2014
[53] Abu-Nimer, Khoury, Welty; Unity in Diversity – Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East, p.9-16, Shenk; Christian. Muslim. Friend
[54] Abu-Nimer, Khoury, Welty; Unity in Diversity – Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East, p.37-41

In comparing the operations of interfaith groups in Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan, certain patterns and dynamics have emerged that affect the models, processes, and perception of success. [55]

The following are some examples.

- The scope and nature of conflict affects the ability to attract people to participate and it impacts the issues discussed. - Strongly motivated and convicted individuals, rather than well-established organisations or representatives of wider communities, participate in the dialogue process. - The interfaith group is a safe space for people to learn about each other´s religion, and to interact. - Involvement of religious leaders contribute to a certain degree of legitimacy and credibility. On the other hand, it is a risk, they play the role of gatekeeper, meaning that the grassroots are not invited and qualified to participate. - There are issues of transferring a culture of dialogue to a wider audience. It is a risk the dialogue groups are limited to a closed circle of elites. - Limits on funding, resources and capabilities restrict the number and scope of activities that are done. - Clear objectives and monitoring mechanism of impact is missing. - There is an absence of coordination and cooperation among professionals in the field. - A more central role for youth in dialogue would strengthen the field. They are seen as the foundation of the future and perceived as more apt to offer understanding and acceptance. - In most of the interfaith processes, political realities, such as government interference, negatively affect the dynamics of interaction among individuals in the dialogue. - Control and manipulation of the organizations´ approaches, perspectives and activities by political ideologies is a problem. - It was noted that media can play positive and negative roles in the interfaith work. Engaging the media in order to promote interfaith work could have a tremendous impact. - There are difficulties in evaluating and measuring interfaith dialogue work. Participants´ misperceptions of the dialogue process are a common limitation. - The absence of professional planning and awareness for interfaith work is an obstacle to effective dialogue. Interfaith activities are conducted on a needs basis. Professional expertise is needed.

When examining interfaith dialogue work, it seems that success is mostly evident in the changes that take place within individuals´ attitudes and perceptions. When people get to know and accept each other and a subculture of trust, respect and friendship is built, it might in turn lead to social change. Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty argue that there needs to be a shift from elite-based to grassroots dialogue, and from a top-down dialogue that discusses theological issues to one that build strong relationships between people. An important trend is the avoidance of discussion of differences through emphasis on similarities. On the other hand, religious differences need to be highlighted. People should be encouraged to think in terms of coexistence. [56]

3.2.3. The Ministry of Reconciliation

In a world of conflict in which religious differences play a significant role, reconciliation to grow is increasingly important. The challenge of reconciliation today is such that it requires

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[55] Abu-Nimer, Khoury, Welty; Unity in Diversity – Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East, p.208-219
[56] Abu-Nimer, Khoury, Welty, Unity in Diversity – Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East, p.219-231

an interreligious effort. In all instances, religious people must find ways to work together to achieve reconciliation, and religious difference is sometimes the cause of social conflict. Unless the spiritual and moral dimensions of human conflict are addressed, we become prisoners of the past, doomed by our memories to repeat history. Several researchers within interfaith dialogue explain that with a *spirituality* of reconciliation we can create the spaces in which reconciliation can happen, and with human *strategies*, how the process of reconciliation can move forward. The elements of both individual and social reconciliation are a model of probity and practicality. Reconciliation has to be a way of living. Steps to consider before reconciliation are acceptance and tolerance. [57]

To develop a spirituality of reconciliation – a combination of political strategy and personal faith – equips believers to serve in the ministry of social healing. It is difficult to speak of a strategy of reconciliation. There are two reasons for this, we are still learning about reconciliation itself and no two social situations of reconciliation are alike.

Based on the writings of Robert J. Schreiter, *reconciliation* is about coming to terms with a concrete past and working toward a different future within the constraints – political, economic, social, cultural and religious – of the context. The focus should be on what reconciliation means in this context and on who the actors are in the reconciliation process. It is of importance to define who or what needs reconciliation, what will be the efficacious means for bringing that about, and what the final state of reconciliation will look like. The process of seeking reconciliation is an essential part of reconciliation itself, i.e. how the process is planned, who leads it, who participate in it, what its stated goals are, where it takes place, etc. [58]

Following Schreiter´s study, social reconciliation is a process of reconstructing a society and that engages an entire population. There are essential requirements for reconciliation commissions, such as the *truth* of what really happened during the violence needs to be defined, the process must lead to a *strengthening of law*, the process must be *democratic and verifiable,* and there should be avenues of redress and reparation for victims, so that they can claim back at least some of what they have lost. [59] Schreiter also explains that individual reconciliation occurs when the victim´s damaged humanity is restored, and brings the victim to a new place. For social reconciliation to be successful, there must be reconciled individuals involved in the process. In this way, individual and social reconciliation are interdependence. A call for truth, justice, repentance and forgiveness needs to be heard in the process.

According to Bronkhorst, the societies tend to go through three phases in their transition from trauma to reconciliation. [60] It is the genesis phase, the transformation phase and the readjustment phase.

[57] Kim, Kollontai, Hoyland; Peace and Reconcilation, McRay; You have heard it said, Smock; Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding

[58] Schreiter; The Ministry of Reconciliation; Spirituality & Strategies, p. 105, 106-108, Schreiter, Jorgensen; Mission of Ministry of Reconciliation

[59] Bronkhorst; Truth and Reconciliation; Obstacles and Opportunities for Humans Rights, p. 150-151

[60] Bronkhorst; Truth and Reconciliation; Obstacles and Opportunities for Humans Rights, p. 31-32

In the first phase, the shifts in relations of power in a conflicted society are getting under way. There is a sense that confrontation is coming. Any calls for reconciliation at this turbulent, *genesis phase*, are in very general terms, and usually do not gain much hearing. The actual beginning of the transition is in the *transformation phase*. It is usually marked by some event that takes on symbolic significance as a turning point. In this second phase there is a possibility of reconciliation. The third phase is the *readjustment phase,* where the reconstruction of society begins. Wrongdoers have to be brought to justice, reparation has to be made to victims, and new structures for society have to be built. What becomes clear in this phase is how much will have to be made right before a just society can be built. A period of chaos occurs. Even when stability is achieved, there is a general mood of disappointment about how things are turned out. It is during the readjustment phase, that programs of reconciliation are carried out, and can no longer afford to be abstract. There are survivors to be cared for, there are concrete instances of violations of human rights to be addressed, there are pardons to complicate matters, etc. [61]

Schreiter emphasizes that it is important that those who work for reconciliation and those who are seeking reconciliation in their own lives are aware of these transition phases and what impact each phase has on the reconciliation work.

3.2.4. The Peace making force in Religion

There is a peace-making force in religion that can help us to mutual understanding, joint efforts for peaceful coexistence and genuine humanity.

The Gospel calls Christians, and the Qur´an calls Muslims, to be witnesses for God. Both the Bible and the Qur´an speak of a God who is merciful, just, sovereign and forgiving. If mission, Christian or Islamic, is in God´s name, it must be carried out in God´s way. This means dialogue, fairness, respect and the opportunity to respond freely.

Chawkat Moucarry´s research on God´s attributes in Islam and Christianity provide a basic understanding of the peace making force in religion.

Moucarry explains that the first attribute to understand is what prompts God to be *merciful*. In Islam it is his goodness and his generosity, while Christians believe it is motivated by God´s sharing in human suffering and his compassion. [62] Christianity perceives the need to be reconciled with God and to be saved by him. It is also important to understand the role of love in each religion. Love in Islam is conditional, while Christians understand God´s love in an overwhelming and personal way. [63]

God is *forgiving* and will always forgive people their sins if they seek his forgiveness. The motives for God´s forgiveness are love, justice, mercy and sovereignty. In Christianity, God´s forgiveness is found in Jesus´ mission. The gospel is all about God´s love. God´s attributes in Christianity have been historically displayed in Jesus, the Saviour, while the attributes in

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[61] Schreiter; The Ministry of Reconciliation; Spirituality & Strategies, p. 6-13
[62] Moucarry; The Search for Forgiveness; Pardon and Punishment in Islam and Christianity, p. 32
[63] Moucarry; The Search for Forgiveness; Pardon and Punishment in Islam and Christianity, p. 34-35

Islam will be revealed on the Day of Judgement. The Qur´an portrays God as the forgiving God, which indicates his merciful character. Within Islam, however, the scope of God´s forgiveness varies in as much as the Muslim community is diverse. In Islam the focus is on God´s judgement, where the paradigm of Islamic faith is creation-submission-judgement. By contrast, the paradigm of Christian faith is creation-sin-redemption, where the focus is on God´s salvation. [64]

Following Moucarry, God is *sovereign* and *just*. The Qur´an points out that God gives us what we deserve. People who commit themselves to God will be treated mercifully. Total commitment is what is meant by "jihad", and "jihadists" will be granted God´s pardon. We are accountable to God. Christian doctrine is pointing out the importance of obedience as well. However, there are a few differences. One is the emphasis of love. Jesus summed up God´s law in a twofold command: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is: "Love your neighbour as yourself". "All the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matt. 22:37-40). In Christianity, the motivation and the purpose of our lives should be loving God and our neighbours. It involves a lifelong commitment to walk in Jesus´ footsteps. Another difference between Christianity and Islam is the distinction between major and minor sins in Islam. In Christianity sin is sin in all its forms and our acts of obedience will not make up for our sins. People need not only to be forgiven, but to be saved. The salvation depends on Jesus´ death and resurrection, and not on our merits. [65]

God is *patient* with the wrongdoers. In Islam, God is not bound to punish sin. He may forgive any sin, or at least minor sins, but he will not forgive polytheism. In Christianity God requires that all sin is punished, but at the same time he offers this forgiveness freely to all sinners, and his patience with sinners seems unlimited. [66]

God turns mercifully to us, and he rejoices when we come back to him. God is the one who initiates our repentance. According to Moucarry, the final attribute is that God is *returning*. From a biblical perspective, we are unable to return to God by ourselves. Jesus reveals who God is. He came from God so that we may return to God. [67]

All theologians agree that God´s pardon is closely related to *faith*. There is a distinction between "faith" and "belief". Faith consists in believing in God and obeying his law. Faith is the peace-making power, the trust that pours out God's ocean of goodness and love. The peace-making force is from God, and all people have access. Religion is also belief; beliefs, traditions, ways of being and acting, etc. [68]

Based on Moucarry´s study, I think that God´s attributes in Islam and Christianity are closer than many of us have realized. The attributes are stated above as forgiving, sovereign, just, patient and returning. Belief in God´s mercy and forgiveness is crucial for all believers, both

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[64] Moucarry; The Search for Forgiveness; Pardon and Punishment in Islam and Christianity, p. 40-44, 316-318, Moucarry; Faith to Faith – Christianity & Islam in dialogue
[65] Moucarry; The Search for Forgiveness; Pardon and Punishment in Islam and Christianity, p. 47-49, 52-54, 56, 60, 318-319, Moucarry; Two prayers for today
[66] Moucarry; The Search for Forgiveness; Pardon and Punishment in Islam and Christianity, p. 65-66
[67] Moucarry; The Search for Forgiveness; Pardon and Punishment in Islam and Christianity, p. 68-77
[68] Kristna Fredsrörelsen, Religionernas fredsskapande kraft i judendom, kristendom och islam, p.23

Muslims and Christians. Forgiveness heals, reconciles and restores, and believers´ belief in forgiveness should have a real impact on their life.

In practice and according to Salim J. Munayer, Muslims and Christians have experienced God´s mercy in a very special way. As a community they are expected to demonstrate in their relationships a deep concern for one another. However, from an Islamic perspective it is appropriate to consider that the Muslim community is not just a religious society, but also a political nation, and at times it has to deal with hostility of other nations. As individuals, Muslims are urged to show a forgiving attitude to non-Muslims, but probably not as a community dealing with potentially threatening nations. Following Munayer, it is worth to comment that Christians must love their enemies because God loves everyone, including those who do not deserve it. Loving enemies implies forgiving them. Unlike the Muslim community, the Christian community is not a political community. This means Christians should have the same forgiving attitude towards believers as well as non-believers. The command about loving our neighbours as ourselves includes everyone. [69]

Islam is no longer an Eastern religion. Up to a third of the Muslim population worldwide live in non-Muslim countries. God´s mercy, forgiveness and patience, proclaimed in the Qur´an, will need to be interpreted as key to understanding Islam if Muslims want their religion to be perceived by non-Muslims as a religion of peace and tolerance. Christians do not usually realize how much in common they have with Muslims. As stated above, Christians and Muslims do not disagree so much, even though Muslims believe that God is one and incomparable, while the Christian doctrine is trinity, and defines God in three divine persons, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

3.2.5. Partnership between Human Rights, Peace-Building and Religious Peace-Building

The focus of this chapter is to present basic concepts of human rights and peace-building which can be helpful in understanding the religious potential in peace work. [70]

Human rights and peace-building present key concepts and agendas for the global and local peace and development process. Most of us believe that working methods and principles go well together. However, many organizations, states and individuals have experienced how priorities of one agenda create friction with the other.

A Human Rights agenda is based on international agreements, and the principle that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights", [71] while a Peace-Building agenda lacks this stage of being internationally ratified. Anyway, the agendas could be seen as overlapping, as the fundamental peace-building principles are cooperation, justice, fairness and mutual respect. [72]

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[69] Munayer; Journey through the storm, Munayer, Loden; Through My Enemy´s Eyes
[70] Khouri, Makdisi, Wählish; Interventions in Conflict
[71] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1
[72] Gunner, Nordquist; An Unlikely Dilemma, p. 5, Nordquist; Gods and Arms – On religion and Armed Conflict

The Human Rights and Peace-Building agendas, respectively, deal with the same reality and with the same goals but do so with different purposes in mind.

The foundation of human rights is used for describing the fundamental rights and freedoms for each and every human being. It is basically the agreed-upon consensus over the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights", accepted by the UN member states. To become part of a better society each human being needs to be protected against abuse and violation and guaranteed civil and political rights as well as economic, social, and cultural rights. [73]

A *human rights-based approach*, according to a research by Göran Gunner and Kjell-Åke Nordquist, includes power relations through a specific perspective, allocating various key roles to participants called rights holders (mainly the individual) and duty bearers (mainly the state). This approach will indicate that the human being shall demand her/his rights. Strategies and goals concerning human rights are focused on a process of respecting (all human beings), promoting (without discrimination and with gender quality), protecting (all rights and freedom), preventing (violations from third parties), and fulfilling (through appropriate action) normative human rights. [74]

At the same time, a human rights-based approach makes priorities by focusing on the marginalized and excluded groups in a society, as well as on non-discrimination. In a global setting it may also include a question of relations between the South and the North, in the struggle for reducing poverty and hunger in the world. Moreover, in many occasions the powerless are women.

Following Gunner and Nordquist, the *concepts of peace processes* include three stages; peace-making (interventions, sanctions, responsibility to protect), peace-keeping (peace-keeping forces, supervising missions for instance of cease-fires) and peace-building (reconstruction, democratic institutions, transitional justice and truth commissions). Focusing on peace-building; it has to be based on a constructive approach in order to establish processes as well as institutions that defend and promote security, justice and welfare on a day-to-day basis. In this way, it has both organizational and relational aspects. Without functioning human beings in a structure, not much will happen. [75] The main goal is nevertheless conflict transformation. [76]

Human rights are about relations between rights holders and duty bearers, and peace-building is about transforming conflicts into peaceful relations between parties and victims and their wider society. The relationship between the agendas should be interdependent, complementary and of mutual respect for their unique characters.

Religious peacebuilding is a term used to "describe the range of activities performed by religious actors and institutions for the purpose of resolving and transforming deadly conflict,

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[73] Gunner, Nordquist; An Unlikely Dilemma, p. 23
[74] Gunner, Nordquist; An Unlikely Dilemma, p. 23-27
[75] Gunner, Nordquist; An Unlikely Dilemma, p. 33-40
[76] Wang; How Can Religion Contribute to Peace in the Holy Land, p.54

with the goal of building social relations and political institutions characterized by an ethos of tolerance and non-violence". [77]

Religious peacebuilding includes, the beliefs, norms, and rituals that pertain to peacebuilding, as well as a range of actors, form religious institutions, faith-based private voluntary organisations that are not formally part of a religious institution, and individuals and groups for whom religion is a significant motivation for their peacebuilding. [78]

According to the theory of Daniel Philpott, religious peacebuilding intervenes in various stages of conflict through a broad array of roles and activities at the local, national, and international levels. The activities can be categorized in four types; observation and witness (e.g., fact finding, monitoring of cease-fires, accompaniment of victims), education and formations (e.g., conflict resolution training, education on peace and justice issues), advocacy and empowerment (e.g., mass protests, efforts to change specific policies), and conciliation and mediation (participation in truth and reconciliation commissions, facilitating peace processes, interfaith dialogue). Peacebuilding also involves multiple time horizons; before ceasefires and regime changes, during the conflict itself, the immediate aftermath, and the often decades-long process of reconstruction and reconciliation after the violence ends. [79]

The concept of religious peacebuilding, according to Margaretha Wang, infuses the religious sphere with the political sphere. One part of the process is cultural peacebuilding, i.e. to build good relations between the groups on social levels. And the other part is structural peacebuilding, meaning to change those structures of society which legitimate the conflict. Such structures can be unequal power relations, lack of freedom of movement or other discriminating practices. A third approach to peacebuilding is elite peacebuilding, which is connected to the decision makers or negotiation partners among the political authorities. In these ways, Wang explains, religious peacebuilding can promote peace. [80]

The indigenous nature of much religious peacebuilding is strengthened by the fact that many religious institutions are relatively unique transnational actors. They are deeply rooted in local communities yet also have a global reach that can surpass that of governments, international institutions, or multinational companies. People power is also about individuals. Religious leaders at the local, national, and international level often have a moral credibility that political, governmental, media, and corporate leaders lack. This moral credibility allows them to be effective advocates for peaceful social change, to mediate between conflicting parties, and to provide new visions for the future in societies torn by conflict. Religious peacebuilding is often effective in places where religious leaders retain a high degree of influence in society at large. [81]

The theoretical recommendations, according to Wang, for how religion could be effective in peacebuilding can be divided into three main interests: 1) the religious potential for peace-work in the individual religious tradition 2) the religious potential for peace-work in an interreligious setting and 3) how to deal constructively with holy sites in order to avoid contest and strife over holy sites. [82]

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[77] Little, Appleby; A moment of Opportunity? p.5
[78] Philpott, Powers; Strategies of Peace p. 322
[79] Philpott, Powers; Strategies of Peace p. 323
[80] Wang, How Can Religion Contribute to Peace in the Holy Land? p.53-60
[81] Philpott, Powers; Strategies of Peace p. 327-328
[82] Wang; How Can Religion Contribute to Peace in the Holy Land? p.233

In order for religious peacebuilding to be most effective, Wang´s recommendations are; to identify how religious traditions could encourage conflict resolution and peacebuilding, to engage different people (scholars, theologians, hierarchs or other officials) who believe in conflict resolution, to develop culturally derived methods for conflict resolution, to draw on a range of actors, networks, institutions and NGOs working in related areas, and to access to the mystical dimensions of the faith tradition. [83]

Linked to the discussion of human rights and peace-building, it can be a discussion about the relationship between religious minority and majority. "Every religious community is a minority somewhere, some religious communities are also religious majorities elsewhere. The local/national majority religious community may perceive the local minority as a threatening representative of a powerful international community." Kajsa Ahlstrand and Göran Gunner stress the importance to find ways to address fears in order to achieve peaceful coexistence between communicates. [84]

In a consultation about non-Muslims in Muslim majority societies, five distinct areas of concern were identified by Ahlstrand and Gunner; [85]

1) The concept of *human rights* finds deep response in Islam and Christianity. In democratic societies, minorities have equal rights with the majority. All member states of the United Nations are bound by international law, and according to the law religious minorities should be granted rights of protection in society.
2) There are forms of secularism that are acceptable and even desirable for religious traditions. A *secular state* is religiously neutral and treating various religious communities as contributors to the common good. The right to hold a belief and to pass it on to the next generation is essential.
3) In many parts of the world there is a difference between educated and uneducated people. The educated know their rights, and they are aware of their responsibilities. They know about their own religious tradition and they know about other traditions. It is priority not only to teach reading and writing, but also awareness of human rights and respectful knowledge about other religions. The role of *education* about rights and religions is important.
4) The question of education is closely linked to that of *identity*. Emotion of belonging is a common human feature. Religious groups need to seek positive identifications that respect the dignity of other religious groups. Local identity maybe more important than national.
5) *Inter-religious dialogue* is about building trust and identifying common concerns.

In societies with religious diversity there is a need for freedom of religion and belief, freedoms that should be protected by legal obligations. The rights must include both the right to hold an inner belief and the right to manifest the belief in public as well as privately. That would accommodate a diversity of religious communities. How to deal with religious diversity? In relation to international law and human rights, either you emphasize being equal

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[83] Wang; How Can Religion Contribute to Peace in the Holy Land? p.59-60, 212-213
[84] Ahlstrand, Gunner; Non-Muslims in Muslim majority societies, p. 2
[85] Ahlstrand, Gunner; Non-Muslims in Muslim majority societies, p. 1-5

nationals in a democratic society, or you emphasize being a religious minority in a religious majority society. Maybe they are parallel possibilities, or can go together with the ambition to rely on equality, democracy, human rights, and freedom of religion. [86]

We hear much talk of "democracy" across the Arab World in these days. Democracy is, of course, much more than multi-party elections and the right to vote. For democracy to work, a country also needs an educated and informed electorate, which in turn needs a free and fair press, which in turn needs a strong and independent judiciary. And, all of these "institutions" of democracy can only survive if there is a strong but accountable security apparatus to maintain law and order. [87]

In order to create a representative structure of this gradual process from war to peace, Gunner and Nordquist have made a division of this process into three phases; conflict, post-conflict and stabilization. Religious actors can serve in the post-conflict phase of the process, among others, as educators and institution builders.

During the *conflict* phase, where violations of human rights are intensified, the working methods are interdependent analysis, giving hope, preparing for reconstruction, opinion-, and capacity-building as well as monitoring, enabling respect and protection. The conflict phase can develop into a permanent occupation, genocide and other crimes against humanity. However, to be considered as turning points in a process from war to peace, is the end of a period of transformation into a stable society as well as the introduction of a peace commitment. There are human rights principles introduced as part of such a peace agreement. [88]

The *post-conflict* phase is a transformative social process. It connects to both the conflict´s history (memory and transitional issues) and to the future (reconstruction, stabilization and development). This phase is a crucial period for successfully establishing the peace as not just a temporary halt in the war, but as a permanent situation after the war. The working methods to be used include peace dividend projects, accountability for the past, reconciliation, improving economic and social conditions and preparing for civil society. [89]

The country is returned to the rule of law during the *stabilization* phase. The violence has stopped and a transfer over to a stable society, with the implementation of human rights and peace-building, has been developed. The poor may still be marginalized. The working methods typical to stabilize the situation in this phase is to introducing a culture of democracy and human rights, building democratic institutions and experiencing norms and trust as well as protecting national minorities. [90]

When the civil society is working with the human rights and peace-building agendas, the capacity can be developed through use of common assumption (using overlapping principles such as the right of life, human rights and truth, and trust), integration (making a new blend), and twinning (preparing the way for each other).

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[86] Ahlstrand, Kajsa, Gunner, Göran, Non-Muslims in Muslim majority societies, p. 28-39
[87] Ascott, Terence, "SAT-7 Contribution to Arab Democracy", 2011
[88] Gunner, Nordquist; An Unlikely Dilemma, p. 90-96, 107-133
[89] Gunner, Nordquist; An Unlikely Dilemma, p. 96-98, 134-153
[90] Gunner, Nordquist; An Unlikely Dilemma, p. 98-99, 154-170

A current example of a dialogue between Muslims and Christians on a high level, where also civil society is involved under the auspices of foreign supervision is the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process.

3.3.   Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process

The particularity of this study is related to its focus on the Middle East conflict, and the specific relationship between religious peace activism and its ability to promote peace. Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process is an example of an organisation that is building inter-faith understanding.

3.3.1. Introduction

The Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process (RTCYPP) under the Auspices of the Embassy of Sweden is a peacebuilding initiative with the religious leaders of Cyprus who are committed to work together for human rights, peace and reconciliation. The religious leaders of Cyprus have demonstrated their commitment to dialogue and peace and have shown the way for the resumption of political negotiations.

The Religious Leaders of Cyprus with accompanies, the Embassy of Sweden Nicosia, Office of RTCYPP
Front row left to right (back row accompanies to the Religious leaders and Embassy of Sweden)
Salpy Eskidjian - Executive Coordinator of RTCYPP, Peter Weiderud - Moderator of RTCYPP, H.E. Archbishop Youssef Soueif of the Maronite Church of Cyprus, H.B. Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Nova Justiniana and All Cyprus, H.E. Dr. Talip Atalay, Mufti of Cyprus, H.E. Archbishop Nareg of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church of Cyprus, Rev Father Jerzy Kraj,Latin Patriarchal Vicar and Representative of the Apostolic Nunciature in Cyprus, H.E. the Ambassador of Sweden Klas Gierow, (picture from Office of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process)

3.3.2. The Cyprus conflict[91]

The Cyprus dispute is an ongoing issue. Cyprus has been divided since 1974 when Turkey invaded the north in response to a military coup on the island which was backed by the Greek government. The island was effectively partitioned with the northern third inhabited by Turkish Cypriots and the southern two-thirds by Greek Cypriots. More than one-third of the Greek Cypriot population was expelled from the occupied northern part of the island, and half the Turkish Cypriot population was displaced from the south to the north. Both parts of the island were "ethnically cleansed". Considerable violence prevailed on both sides.

As a result of the two communities and the guarantor countries committing themselves to finding a peaceful solution to the dispute, the United Nations maintain a buffer zone (the "Green Line") to avoid any further intercommunal tensions and hostilities. This zone separates the free, southern areas of the Republic of Cyprus (predominately inhabited by Greek Cypriots), from the northern areas (where Turkish Cypriots along with Turkish settlers are now a majority).

The Religious Leaders of Cyprus visits the Committee
on Missing Person's laboratory in the UN controlled buffer zone.
(picture from Office of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process)

Peace talks failed and an administration started to form in the North. In 1983, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) was created. Although the Republic of Cyprus is recognized as the sole legitimate state, sovereign over all the island, the north is de facto under the administration of the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which is under Turkish Cypriots and Turkish Armed Forces control. The TRNC lacks international recognition, with the exception of Turkey. The occupation is viewed as illegal under international law, amounting to illegal occupation of European Union territory since Cyprus became its member.

Although there were a few peace initiatives after this point, little chance for reunification remained, and both parts of the island set out on their own path. The Southern part flourished in an economy driven by tourism, manufacturing and banking, whereas the Northern part, under international embargo and general international stigma, remained relatively poor and underdeveloped.

In 2003, the Green Line checkpoints were opened, which up until then had remained sealed for Cypriots and highly restricted for foreigners. In time for the planned entry of Cyprus into the EU, UN general secretary Kofi Annan worked out a peace plan, the Annan Plan, which

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[91] U.S. Department of State Country Reports; Utrikespolitiska Institutet, Länder i fickformat nr 406 Cypern; Utrikespolitiska Institutet, Landguiden Cypern; Regeringskansliet, Utrikesdepartementet, Mänskliga rättigheter på Cypern 2010

was accepted by the Turkish Cypriots but rejected by the Greek Cypriots, leaving the Greek Cypriot side to enter the EU on its own.

The division of the island still dominates Cypriot political life. Both sides have very fixed views on the issue, and any attempt to question these will often be met with hostility. The main stumbling blocks for a solution are the property issue, bi-communal structure, and the Turkish mainland settlers.

It appears that the administration in the North expropriated the properties of Greek Cypriot refugees. The Greek Cypriots still lay claim to their properties in the North. The Turkish Cypriots have taken few measures to recuperate property in the South.

After the inter-communal violence in the years leading up to the division of the island, Turkish Cypriots are wary of living as a minority in a Greek Cypriot dominated state. They want their own federal state on an equal footing with the Greek one. Greek Cypriots, however, see the island as one and the Turkish Cypriots as a minority, and they consider it unjust to accord a minority such generous rights.

The poor Turkish Cypriot economy led many Turkish Cypriots to leave their country. They have been replaced by settlers from mainland Turkey in search of economic opportunities. Greek Cypriots demand that these settlers, or at least most of them, move back to Turkey; Turkish Cypriots are not willing to accept a wholesale deportation.

The division of Cyprus has been an ongoing and difficult problem, making relations between Turkey and Greece problematic. The situation of human rights in Cyprus today remain unsatisfactory as long as the Cyprus conflict has not reached a political solution. Repeated attempts at unification (which both sides claim to want) and the formation of one federal government are yet to be successful. However, recent years have seen warming of relations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, with officially renewed reunification talks beginning in early 2014.

Many around the world warmly welcome the resumption on 15 May 2015 of negotiations between the Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades and the Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci. The two leaders announced their commitment "to work tirelessly to reach as soon as possible a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus question", and to pursue a "shared vision for a united federal Cyprus". They have agreed to meet at least twice a month to take this process forward.

3.3.3. Religion demography[92]

About three quarters of the total population, i.e. almost all Greek Cypriots, belongs to the Greek Orthodox Church (78 %). Most Turkish Cypriots are officially Sunni Muslim (18 %). Both ethnic groups are today, however, rather secular. Other religious groups (4 %) include Roman Catholics, Protestants, Maronite Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, Bahais, and Buddhists. Recent immigrants and migrant workers are

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[92] U.S. Department of States, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014 – Cyprus; U.S. Department of States Country Reports; Utrikespolitiska Institutet, Länder i fickformat nr 406 Cypern; Utrikespolitiska Institutet, Landguiden Cypern

predominantly Roman Catholics, Muslims, and Buddhists. Most of the Jews are foreign-born residents.

3.3.4. Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process

The purpose of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process (RTCYPP) has been to build relationship, understanding and trust between the religious leaders in Cyprus. While the core of the Cyprus conflict is not a religious one, religion plays an active role in the political and social life of the island, and religion is one of the victims in this political conflict of nearly five decades. [93]

I have explored the inter-religious communication in Cyprus (as a "part of the Middle East"), and to what extent the religious leaders can offer constructive contributions to the peace process and in particular to the complex process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Archbishop Chrysostomos II and Mufti Talip Atalay are the first religious leaders of Cyprus in over 5 decades who established a successful working relationship with each other, with the help of Swedish facilitation. In 2012, the Greek Orthodox primate of the Church of Cyprus and the Muslim Mufti invited the heads of the Armenian Orthodox, Maronite and Latin Catholic Churches to join them in their efforts to advocate for religious freedom, human rights and peace in Cyprus.

Originally a quiet initiative that started in 2009 at the residence of the Swedish Ambassador to Cyprus, the RTCYPP has evolved into an active peacebuilding effort based on 4 pillars: build trust among the religious leaders and communities, promote confidence building measures, ensure the protection of religious monuments and advocate for the right to access and worship.

By February 26 2014, the religious leaders signed the *Joint Statement on the Resumption of Peace Talks,* and on November 24, 2015 the *Joint Statement of the Religious Leaders of Cyprus, against all forms of attacks, terrorism and violence*. [94]

The RTCYPP has brought about important breakthroughs for religious freedom and human rights in Cyprus fostering interreligious, cross-community communication and cooperation. The road ahead is still long and the challenges many, but the religious leaders of Cyprus reiterate their commitment to working together for human rights and peace within the framework of the RTCYPP. [95]

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[93] www.religioustrack.com – Office of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process
[94] Appendices section 7.2
[95] www.religioustrack.com – Office of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process

The Office of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process under the Auspices of the Embassy of Sweden is established to encourage, facilitate and serve the religious leaders' dialogue and efforts for religious freedom and peace in Cyprus, and to contribute positively and constructively to the Cyprus peace talks. The Office is based at the Home for Cooperation in the UN controlled buffer zone in Nicosia.

The Religious Leaders of Cyprus with representatives and accompanies, Executive Coordinator of RTCYPP, Embassy of Sweden Nicosia together with Special Adviser of the UN Secretary-General on Cyprus Mr. Espen Barth Eide and Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Chief of Mission Mrs. Lisa M. Buttenheim (picture from Office of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process)

According to "Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (UDHR)

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance"

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a milestone document in the history of human rights, drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world. The Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 Dec 1948, General Assembly Resolution 217 A, as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations. It sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected.

3.3.5. References of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process

Mrs Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs, welcomed the United Nations efforts to reach an agreement on the Cyprus issue and acknowledged the role of the religious leaders of Cyprus in the reconciliation process at the Parliamentary debate on Foreign Affairs 2016 in the Swedish Parliament. The Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs says; "The Government welcomes the UN efforts to reach an agreement on the Cyprus issue. A solution would strengthen the UN's authority and the EU's ability to manage the challenges in its neighbourhood. Sweden has taken a unique initiative for cooperation between Cyprus' religious leaders, who have an important role to play in the reconciliation process." [96]

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[96] Government of Sweden, Mrs Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs, 2016, p.4

On 6 January 2016, the Secretary-General on the United Nations operation in Cyprus reported that the religious leaders of Cyprus "issued a joint statement expressing their united voice against all forms of attacks, terrorism and violence in Cyprus and beyond, stressing that the dialogue they had experienced had strengthened their conviction that there would be no future without tolerance, mutual understanding, respect and peaceful coexistence". [97]

Also, "The ongoing dialogue among the leaders of the religious communities contributes positively to the climate surrounding the talks. By easing access to religious sites across the island, religious leaders have played an important role in fostering understanding and reducing mistrust between the communities which, in turn, has helped build grassroots support for reunification. In the critical months ahead, I strongly encourage both sides to continue to support this cooperation, by enabling full access to the more than 500 churches and other places of worship in the north and to approximately 100 mosques in the south." [98]

Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, says "In Cyprus, the enhanced interreligious communication between Christian and Muslim leaders has led to recent breakthroughs, including the re-opening of churches and mosques that had been inaccessible for decades owing to the protracted conflict on the island. Religious leaders have initiated emergency measures and cleaned up each other's places of worship, thus creating an atmosphere of goodwill and trust. Some interreligious encounters in Cyprus have been open to participation beyond the traditional religious communities, including Evangelicals, Baha'is, Buddhists and others, thus building awareness on the further emergence of religious pluralism." [99]

Dr. Heiner Bielefeldt, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, has participated in several interreligious round tables held in Cyprus, organized by the Office of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process. He explained how dialogue is "conducted in a spirit of goodwill, cooperation and sincere intentions" between the religious leaders in Cyprus. He praised the religious leaders, and encouraged them to create an inclusive institutional framework to promote ongoing communication. [100] His recommendation is to promote interreligious communication, both at the level of religious leaders and at the grass-roots levels. For instance, religious leaders from the southern and northern parts should be encouraged to collaborate more in the maintenance and repair of religious sites and places of worship. Women should always play an active part in interreligious dialogue initiatives and programs.[101]

In addition, the Special Rapporteur agreed "that the Cyprus conflict is not, per se, a religious conflict and that the political tensions at the heart of the conflict did not chiefly stem from religious differences. For centuries, people of diverse religious orientations – in particular Christians and Muslims – by and large lived peacefully side-by-side, an accomplishment which surprisingly seems to have survived the various political crises and conflicts that have affected the island, especially in the years before and after independence. When talking with representatives of various religious communities, as well as people from different urban and rural areas in the country, the Special Rapporteur received the strong impression that religious diversity has been embraced by the population at large as a hallmark of Cyprus past

[97] Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations operations in Cyprus, S/2016/11, 2016, item 35
[98] Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations operations in Cyprus, S/2016/11, 2016, item 52
[99] Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, A/HRC/31/18, 2015, item 42
[100] Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, A/HRC/25/58, 2013, item 44
[101] Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, A/HRC/22/51/Add.1, 2012, item 90

and present." [102] Although the Cyprus conflict is of a political nature, religion does play a role in that conflict, since it has been seen as a major defining factor of the two ethnic communities on which the "bi-communal" structure of the State is based. [103]

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the question of human rights in Cyprus recognized RTCYPP as well. It was noted that cooperation among the religious leaders had led to consistent progress in the realization of freedom of religion or belief on the whole island. In October 2015, the Cyprus Inter-religious Platform for Human Rights was established in order to facilitate and broaden the dialogue between religious communities and civil society organizations on the island. [104]

In November 2015, "the Greek Orthodox Archbishop, the Mufti of Cyprus, the Maronite Archbishop, the Armenian Archbishop and the Patriarchal Latin Vicar in Cyprus issued a joint statement expressing their united voice against all forms of attack, terrorism and violence in the island, the region and the world at large. They also expressed their commitment to working together for human rights and peace in Cyprus. The religious leaders stressed that the dialogue they had experienced together had strengthened their conviction that there was no future without tolerance, mutual understanding, respect and peaceful coexistence." [105]

It was also reported that "there were several positive developments with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights in Cyprus. They include progress in the search for and identification of the remains of missing persons; a significant increase in the number of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots crossing the Green Line; an encouraging level of interreligious communication and cooperation; the completion of several conservation works of cultural heritage sites on the whole island; the establishment of a bi-communal committee on gender equality; and an agreement to create a bi-communal committee on education." [106]

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[102] Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, A/HRC/22/51/Add.1, 2012, item 33
[103] Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, A/HRC/22/51/Add.1, 2012, item 34
[104] Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the question of human rights in Cyprus, A/HRC/31/21, 2016, item 9, 42
[105] Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the question of human rights in Cyprus, A/HRC/31/21, 2016, item 43
[106]Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the question of human rights in Cyprus, A/HRC/31/21, 2016, item 58

International Religious Freedom Report, U.S. Department of States, says; "the leaders of the main religious groups on the island continued to meet and visit places of worship across the "green line." The Archbishop of the Church of Cyprus invited the Muslim community's Mufti to visit several mosques in the south that have been closed for more than 40 years. Vice President Biden held a roundtable in Cyprus with the Archbishop of the Church of Cyprus, the Mufti, the Maronite Archbishop, the Armenian Archbishop, and the Roman Catholic Church representative to Cyprus to promote religious dialogue and tolerance. " [107]

Imam Shakir with accompany and Father Savvas on
a joint visit to churches in north Cyprus.
(picture from Office of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process)

Rev Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, the World Council of Churches General Secretary, has recognized the efforts and role of the religious leaders of Cyprus and their commitment to dialogue and peace. He thanks Archbishop Chrysostomos II of the Church of Cyprus and Mufti of Cyprus Dr Talip Atalay for their personal leadership and their commitment to peace building through the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process. He prays that they – together with the Armenian Orthodox, Maronite and Latin Catholic religious leadership – will be further strengthened to continue to lead the way on this pilgrimage of justice and peace. [108]

Special Representative for Religion and Global Affairs of the U.S. Department of States, Dr. Shaun Casey, met with the religious leaders of Cyprus in March 2016. "We are very happy for the interest shown by the U.S. State Department on the role of religion in the public sphere," says Peter Weiderud, Moderator of the Religious Track and Director of Swedish Institute in Alexandria. "This is a recognition of our efforts with the religious leaders of Cyprus for peace and reconciliation in the island and an affirmation of all stakeholders."

"Religious leaders are the guideposts for their communities in espousing values of respect, offering pardon, welcoming the stranger, and caring for one another. These values are shared across religious traditions and historically have served as the cornerstone of reconciliation," stated Dr. Casey at the press conference following the meeting. "I have been amazed at the dedication and hard work of the religious leaders in Cyprus, who categorically condemn all

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[107] U.S Department of States, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014 – Cyprus
[108] Statement of the World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary: 18 May, 2015, www.oikoumene.org – World Council of Churches

forms of violence and are building ties amongst their followers towards a just, comprehensive and lasting solution for all of the people of Cyprus." "The religious leaders I have met in Cyprus already are engaging courageously in conversations about tough issues, such as brokering church/mosque property, security concerns, territorial boundaries, and the like. While incredibly important and fruitful, the process of reconciliation begins with ordinary people. This is where religious leaders and communities are integral in illustrating that no conflict needs to be permanent. And this has and must continue to be modelled as Cyprus works toward a settlement…and beyond."

3.3.6. A work in progress

Negotiations around Cyprus had gone on for more than 40 years between the political leaders of the two communities to reach a settlement of its problem by ending the island's division and restoring peace. The value and importance of dialogue among religious leaders in Cyprus goes beyond its shores and can become a vital model for the Middle East and other regions.

Salpy Eskidjian, Executive Coordinator for the Office of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, says that "Courageous united steps led by the religious leaders of Cyprus continue, breaking decades of taboos, witnessing together the sad consequences of political conflict and decades of separation on their respective places of worship and cemeteries. We support the efforts of the religious leaders of Cyprus, working together for human rights and religious freedom, building bridges of communication and trust, encouraging their joint witness and action for peace and reconciliation."

Throughout 2015 and 2016, the five religious leaders met, spoke and worked together with the facilitation of the Office RTCYPP for freedom of religion and human rights, presented concrete proposals that would build confidence and trust among the faith communities, and expressed their readiness to stand by and support the political leaders negotiating. "When Christian and Muslim religious leaders separated for decades, start working together and advocate for each other's rights ...miracles happen!!", Eskidjian says. The religious leaders are writing a positive page in the history of Cyprus.

The Office of the RTCYPP organize joint visits of the religious leaders of Cyprus to places of worship and cemeteries. Moreover, the religious leaders have visited the Anthropological laboratory of the Committee on Missing Persons (CMP) [109]. At the laboratory, the religious leaders made a unanimous appeal on the humanitarian issue of identifying remains from the people declared missing since the struggles of 1960 and 1974. The leaders appealed to the public that whoever may have knowledge of the whereabouts of possible burial sites, should be encouraged to speak. The religious leaders showed a united voice for the truth to come forth in order to bring peace to the families of missing persons, and highlighted the issue's humanitarian cause of closure and peace, thereby not focusing on blaming 'the other' for the death of a family member. They emphasised the shared pain across the divide.

Other meetings arranged are with Mr Espen Barth Eide, the United Nations Secretary General's Special Advisor on Cyprus and Ms Lisa Buttenheim, Deputy Special Advisor and

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[109] The CMP employs a bi-communal forensic team of more than 60 Cypriot archeologists, anthropologists and geneticists, who conduct excavations throughout the island and anthropological and genetic analyses of remains at the CMP Anthropological Laboratory.

Special Representative of the UN Secretary General to Cyprus. The meetings are facilitated and hosted by the Office of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process under the Auspices of the Embassy of Sweden.

A delegation of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process together with H.E. Bishop Porfyrios of Neapolis, representing H.B. Archbishop Chrysostomos II, and Dr Talip Atalay, Mufti of Cyprus concluded a successful trip to Geneva where, on 11th March 2016, the two religious leaders addressed the 31st Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council at a side event on "Interreligious Communication, Freedom of Religion and Peacebuilding". "One could say that the Religious Track has changed the roles of the religious leaders from being part of the conflict, to being part of a negotiated solution for peace", stated Ambassador Veronika Bard of Sweden in her opening remarks.

Peter Weiderud, Moderator of the Religious Track and Director at the Swedish Institute Alexandria, Egypt, noted that dialogue is a necessity, and this can entail engaging in dialogue with people viewed as enemies. "It is with the enemy that we make peace, not with friends," he said. "Before this dialogue both the Mufti and the Archbishop would have seen the other as extremists," said Weiderud, while asserting that inter-religious dialogue is always promoting peace. He argued that freedom of religion and belief can be an excellent opportunity to promote dialogue. "We saw this in Cyprus two weeks ago when we had a burning of a mosque outside Nicosia where the Mufti and the Archbishop stood up together with a common language to deescalate the tension. Ten years ago this would have been a spark that would have set off a major fire," noted Weiderud.

One of the initiators of RTCYPP, Peter Weiderud, shares his experience working for peace in Cyprus with the religious leaders of the island since 2009. "The religious leaders of Cyprus have learned that it is very difficult to reach results in a situation of conflict, if they only address their own needs and in a national context. However, when they talk together, and address principle concerns, which are in line with human rights law, they can count on international support for their claims. And when they stand up for the needs of each other, they are able to use the political trust within their own communities to enhance the human rights agenda and contribute to confidence building. This is the main learning from the Religious Track, which could be shared with others and also be applied in other conflicts and contexts."

Some years ago Archbishop Chrysostomos II and Mufti Atalay co-hosted the first ever faith-based dialogue encounter for Cypriot youth together with Muslim, Jewish and Christian youth from Palestine and Israel, for a one-week residential peacebuilding workshop. This first concrete project, with the full cooperation of the two religious leaders of Cyprus, was organized and coordinated by the Office of RTCYPP. The youth participants of the faith-based workshop initiated the first Cyprus Inter-Religious Youth for Peace network.

I asked Salpy Eskidjian, Executive Coordinator, Office of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, how she think Religious Track best contributes to peace, forgiveness and reconciliation in Cyprus (as a "part of the Middle East")?

"The RTCYPP aims to build trust and confidence among the religious leaders of Cyprus separated for decades as well as their respective communities in order to contribute constructively to peace and reconciliation in Cyprus. As long as there are good synergies, the RTCYPP can contribute to the parallel political peace negotiations. Wherever there is

interreligious dialogue and cooperation in conflict situations we see that religion contributes to conflict resolution, transformation and peacebuilding. The basis of RTCYPP is the human rights framework in general, and the framework of freedom of religion in particular. These are also the base of a sustainable peace. To reach a peace agreement there has to be a process of reconciliation built into it. Reconciliation cannot be the fruit of a peace-agreement, it is the essence of reaching that agreement. Religion and religious leaders can play a very positive role if engaged constructively. The South African Truth and Reconciliation and the role religious leaders played in that process is a concrete example of success.", Eskidjian says.

Eskidjian explains that "dialogue and cooperation in Cyprus will persevere as the religious leaders know too well that a united witness for peace, a united voice for human rights is better than the success or failure of one alone". The religious leaders bringing the faith communities together inspire the political leaders.

Mufti of Cyprus, H.E. Dr. Atalay recently reiterated at an event that as religious leaders' "From the beginning we have been very supportive of free access to places of worship. In principle this is part of our religion, religious monuments should always be respected. We all support religious freedom. Our job is not to do politics but to create and build hope in the hearts of people so that our hearts, tongues and actions would be identical". In the closing message, H.E Archbishop Y. Souief of the Maronite Church expressed his commitment that the religious leaders of Cyprus will continue to work together "to build a culture of justice, a culture of peace, a culture of reconciliation, a culture of love not only in Cyprus but also in the region and become a beacon of hope everywhere".

Eskidjian argues that the interreligious dialogue for human rights and peace in Cyprus must go on and should further broaden its ownership in Cyprus; the perspectives towards the region and self-understanding of diversity in Cyprus.

Thus the need for organised dialogue in a Middle East conflict zone has been realised by the RTCYPP. Against the torn history of the Cyprus conflict the heads of religious communities decided to sit together in talks for human rights, religious freedom, peace and reconciliation. However, as stated above, it is a work in progress and the challenges have been in fostering understanding and reducing mistrust between the communities. In the second last section I will seek to analyse and evaluate the (RTCYPP) in relation to the research questions about interfaith dialogue and religious peacebuilding in the Middle East.

4. Analysis and Evaluation

The theme of this thesis is Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Peacebuilding in the Middle East. In the first section (3.1) I introduced the religious landscape of the Middle East, clarified the historical development and the identity of Christianity and Islam, and discussed the circumstances of conflict, violence and co-existence in the Middle East. In the second section (3.2) of my study, I discussed interfaith dialogue and religious peacebuilding, and how this could be used in the Middle East. I also clarified the peace-making force in religion and its partnership with human rights. Next (3.3), I presented the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process (RTCYPP) as an example of an organisation that is building inter-faith understanding and addressing public issues of moral concern.

My intention was to reflect on the functions of religion as resource, and identity as power for motivation in the political and social realities of the Middle East.

The research questions used are "In what ways could an interfaith dialogue, prove to play a positive role in addressing violations of human rights?" and "How do Muslim and Christian believers contribute to peace, forgiveness and reconciliation in the Middle East, focused on Cyprus?"

This chapter is divided into three sections. Firstly, we are interested in the complexity of the multi-religious landscape of the Middle East. Secondly, I briefly summarize the concept of inter-faith dialogue and religious peacebuilding. In the third section, the theoretical arguments about interfaith dialogue and religious peacebuilding are tested against an empirical environment, which is the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process (RTCYPP). This final analysing and evaluation in relation to RTCYPP is the main section.

4.1.   Religious Landscape of the Middle East

In this first section, by introducing the religious landscape of the Middle East, I clarified the historical development and identity of Christianity and Islam, and discussed the circumstances of conflict, violence and co-existence in the Middle East.

This study found that it is of importance to understand the collective religious history. The Middle East is deeply affected by religious identities. Three major religious groups, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, originated in the Middle East, and people of different religious belonging have lived side by side through the ages. All three religions share the belief that God wants them to live a life full of respect for justice, peace, forgiveness and human relationships.

Although the study shows that religion is one element of identity that can often contribute to violence, faith should not be seen as an ingredient that fuels the explosion of conflict into violence and war but rather as a foundation that can support efforts to build peace. The Middle East has been characterized by a history of organic mixing of politics and religion.

The analyses have shown that it is primarily through a process in which groups and individuals first seek a deep understanding of their own religious traditions and are willing to learn and recognize the richness of other religious traditions that constructive dialogue can be fostered.

Religious peacebuilding is motivated and shaped by deeply held religious beliefs and has a stature and credibility that is largely derived from religious identity. Therefore, any analysis of religious peacebuilding must go beyond an approach that focuses primarily on its political efficacy, and understand it in the context of larger issues of religious identity.

I then discussed the complexity of religious peacebuilding, especially the need to consider religion on its own terms and appreciate the rich set of religious resources that can be mobilized on behalf of peacebuilding.

While just acknowledging each other´s worldview is not going to solve the varied issues in the Middle East, it is a necessary starting point for any real progress. Studying the historical context brought to my mind some new concerns and some new hopes. Understanding the fallen churches tells about the history of Christianity and its interaction with other faiths. Rather than asking why churches die, we should seek to know how they survive, in seemingly impossible circumstances. The late King Hussein of Jordan said "Christians are the glue that holds the Middle East together". Today, the Christians are 4 % of the total population.

There is a need of building up the institutions of democracy in the Middle East region. Of special concern is changing attitudes by the majority to the minority in their midst. The people in the region living in divided societies and wanting more freedom but haven´t agreed on how to make that possible.

The Arab Uprisings of 2011 resulted in tragedy for many and enormous infrastructure losses that will take some countries decades to recover from. Sadly, today 50 million people are living lives impacted by civil war and anarchy in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya and the occupied territories. The refugee surge has created an education crisis affecting millions of children.

In order to transfer over to a stable society, the working methods are to introducing a culture of democracy and human rights.

4.2. Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Peacebuilding in the Middle East

In this second section, by studying interfaith dialogue and religious peacebuilding, I clarified the peace-making force in religion and its partnership with human rights and how this can be used in the Middle East.

Today, we are witnessing a very difficult reality. The world is in chaos, conflicts are spreading, and terror is an everyday reality for tens of thousands of people. The current flood of refugees into Europe, again reminds us of the hopelessness in the Middle East and the enormous humanitarian and spiritual needs of the region.

The finding of this thesis is that interfaith dialogue contributes toward conflict resolution because of its concept of reconciliation, which involves processes of confession, repentance, mercy, and forgiveness. These processes are drawing on religious resources as the basis for dialogue. The discourse of "peaceful coexistence" between people from the different Abrahamic religions has always been integral to life in the Middle East.

Following this study, there is a peace-making force in religion. Both the Bible and the Qur´an speak of a God who is merciful, just, sovereign and forgiving. In the encounters with neighbours of other religious traditions, people have come to experience the meaning of a common humanity. This experience is rooted in the affirmation that God is the creator and sustainer of all creation. Religion can be a useful resource for critiques of the wider society, and as such a call for social change.

In this way, religious peacebuilders share a framework that begins with the conviction that the pursuit of justice and peace by peaceful means is a sacred priority in each of the traditions represented. According to the findings of this thesis, religious traditions also often contain core precepts that contribute to peacebuilding, that are generally not found in conventional political discourse, such as forgiveness, love of enemy and solidarity with the poor and oppressed. In addition, religious leaders and institutions often have a definite political impact – mediating conflicts, opposing authoritarian regimes and advocating for specific public policies.

This notion of the importance of implementing religions in conflict resolution is based on some distinctive aspects of religion: Peace-making is integral to the faith and practice of most religions. Religion offers critical understanding of the process of peace making, because religious traditions provide some of the fundamental explanations for and insights into both war and peace. Religious traditions possess unique authority and capacity among the followers of the particular religion to deal with conflicts. Finally, it can be effective in practical ways, particularly in reconciliation.

Recognition of interfaith dialogue as an integral part of peace-making work is based on the assumption that fostering deeper relationships between people on opposite sides of a conflict is a critical part of the resolution of conflict.

Interfaith dialogues should be "civilized" and not hurt the feelings of others. However, it is impossible to measure if people get upset or not. It is of importance to use the freedom of expression wisely, to win hearers rather than lose them. Attacking someone else's beliefs in any way, simply offends them and helps ensure that they do not again participate in the dialogue. A religious peacebuilding process needs to offer hope, help and good news without causing unnecessary offence or turning people away by insulting or belittling what they have believed and held sacred for generations.

The feeling of being violated entitles however, never resorting to weapons or conduct bloody acts of violence in the name of religion.

One of the greatest obstacles to peacebuilding is ignorance: Ignorance of the other (causing fear and rejection), of other models of society and behaviour. Different people need to meet each other face-to-face and discover the commonalties they have, the humanity and goodness in each other, and to build trust. People also need to be exposed to other societies and social models. And there needs to be honest public debate about the lose-lose practice of revenge.

4.3.   Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process

In this third section, the theoretical arguments about interfaith dialogue and religious peacebuilding are tested against an empirical environment, which is the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process (RTCYPP) under the Auspices of the Embassy of Sweden. The purpose of the RTCYPP is to build relationship, understanding and trust between the religious leaders in Cyprus. The study explores the inter-religious communication in Cyprus (as a part of the Middle East), and to what extent the religious leaders can offer constructive contributions to the peace process and in particular to the complex process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

We are interested in the kind of religious peacebuilding the RTCYPP is engaged with. To analyse this, I have used theoretical frameworks mentioned in previous chapters of this thesis. I used a broad analytical framework based on the interest for religion, interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding from a number of researchers: Abu-Nimer, Ahlstrand, Ansary, Cragg, Gunner, Jenkins, Khoury, Moucarry, Munayer, Nordquist, Philpott, Schreiter, Wang and Welty.

Dialogue can be organized while conflict is ongoing, as a step toward ending the conflict, or in the post-conflict period, as a contribution toward reconciliation. This evaluation shows that RTCYPP seeks to contribute to both phases.

The research "Unity and Diversity" by Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty, point out the desire for interfaith dialogue in polarized societies, and confirm that religion can be a source of peace. The religious leaders of Cyprus have demonstrated their commitment to dialogue and peace. Bringing religion into the dialogue allows the participants to engage in the process, with their religious identity as their primary point of reference. Interreligious dialogue through face-to-face encounters has proven to be a useful resource for breaking down stereotypes and prejudices between the groups in conflict.

In many cases, religious communities are first responders to crises, so if the crop fails in a village, the religious leader – be it the Imam, be it the Orthodox priest – is going to see the impact in the faces of his religious community. So they feel the pain, they feel the suffering in a way that very few other civil society groups do. In general, it must be understood that religious leaders can contribute to social change.

4.3.1. The concept of religious peacebuilding

Based on Wang´s concept of religious peacebuilding, I believe that the religious sphere infuses with the political sphere. Wang also explained the different levels within religious peacebuilding specifically and also gave a framework for understanding the impact each of these levels could have on peace-work. The elite level can have a long-term, but more indirect influence. The mid-level works with religious leaders and can have an effect on the communities where these religious leaders work. The grassroots level has a more direct influence on individuals. As regards the RTCYPP, the potential for cooperation between the elite-level of religious peacebuilding and the mid-level is alive.

According to Wang, one approach to peacebuilding is elite peacebuilding, which is connected to the decision makers or negotiation partners among the political authorities. High-level religious leaders in Cyprus are convened to speak collectively as advocates for peace. The focus is joint action on behalf of peace. I believe this can be effective where religious communities are among the sources of societal division and conflict. The religious leaders engage in mediation. These efforts are often most effective when they employ religious precepts and rituals in the process. The involvement of religious leaders in Cyprus contribute to a certain degree of legitimacy and credibility. The religious leaders affirm their right and obligation to speak for their communities.

However, Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty stress the importance of grassroots dialogue, and a shift from a top-down dialogue that discusses theological issues to one that builds strong relationships between people. It is a risk, the religious leaders play the role of gatekeeper, meaning that the grassroots are not invited and qualified to participate, and the dialogue

groups are limited to a closed circle of elites. There are issues of transferring a culture of dialogue to a wider audience. On the other hand, in Cyprus things are very much top-down, so if the leaders agree the rest might follow.

4.3.2. The religious potential in its peace-work

Wang makes the distinction of the religious potential for peace-work in the individual religious tradition, the potential in an interreligious setting as well as how to deal constructively with the issue of holy sites in an interfaith dialogue. The presentation of RTCYPP reveals some similarities with these theoretical recommendations for how religion could be effective in peacebuilding. It seeks to find ways of how the religious tradition can encourage peaceful coexistence. As regards the interreligious setting, it brings people from different religious communities together, and focus on common values between the parties to create bonds between the religious communities in Cyprus. Moreover, RTCYPP encourages a holistic approach to holy sites by mutual understanding and respect for the sacred sites of the other. I believe, RTCYPP connects ethical values of Islam and Christianity to promote peaceful coexistence.

Following Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty´s models for interfaith dialogue, RTCYPP falls under the category of the model of social action and the focus of theology that is based on social relations, advocacy and nonviolent actions. Interfaith meetings based on such theology promote dialogue through action for social justice. The dignity of each human being, forgiveness, awareness and reconciliation, combined with a call for social action to help in the peace process, are all central values in the work of RTCYPP. It pays attention to common concerns such as the separation wall, property issues, bi-communal structure, protection of religious monuments, religious freedom, human rights, etc. It should nevertheless be pointed out that RTCYPP does not mainly focus on dialogue, but rather on human rights. The pro-social values in Islam and Christianity, the call to pursue peace and involvement in social action are central dimensions in the process to promote peace in Cyprus. Abu-Nimer, Moucarry and other researchers emphasize the potential of developing peacebuilding strategies from Islam and Christianity, in order to establish a just society.

It is worth mentioning that another approach is to highlight the theological and scriptural similarities among religious groups in conflict, as well as to seek to ameliorate the hostility that may be engendered by theological differences. In relation to RTCYPP the approach is taken through sharing religious rituals to enhance mutual understanding.

4.3.3. The religious leaders

Religious leaders at the local level often have a moral credibility that political, governmental, media, and corporate leaders lack. This moral credibility allows them to be effective advocates for peaceful social change. In Cyprus, the religious leaders retain a high degree of influence in society at large.

Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty suggest some ground rules for making an interfaith dialogue as effective as possible. I found that RTCYPP have developed methods for conflict resolution

which are based on the religious and local context, and where the religious leaders as participants in the process, respect and accept each other, undertake a realistic view of their faith, and are considered to have equal status and importance.

The analyses have shown that it is important that people involved in interfaith dialogue firmly plant their roots within their own religious tradition. When there is a deep understanding of one´s own religious beliefs and commitments that progress can be made in achieving true understanding and respect for the religious values and beliefs of others. The religious leaders in Cyprus are well grounded in their own faith and should be positioned to build bridges of respect and understanding.

The peacebuilding challenge for religious leaders is to promote a civic form of national identity that upholds the religious freedom of minorities, and embraces religious pluralism as an important part of a healthy democracy.

4.3.4. Certain patterns that affect the peace-building process

The theory framework and the research results in this thesis have shown how certain patterns affect the peace-building process. Applicable to RTCYPP, it is noted that RTCYPP has managed to bring about many breakthroughs for religious freedom, steps that had never been taken before. The facilitators have the trust of the religious leaders and work hard to ensure that religion in Cyprus will play a positive role for peace. RTCYPP has also succeeded in engaging the media in order to promote interfaith work. The religious leaders strive toward mutual respect. Partners in a dialogue are responsible for hearing and listening to the self-understanding of each other's faith.

On the other hand, I think a challenge for RTCYPP, and other peacebuilders, is to stay relevant, for its staff to stay in touch with all the changes going on across the region. Another challenge is the vulnerability of a limited organization and its dependence on a few people. Funding could also be an inhibitor, depending on global politics and economics. Moreover, a more central role for youth in dialogue would probably strengthen the field.

4.3.5. Interfaith dialogue

According to the theoretical arguments of Schreiter and Bronkhorst, the process of seeking reconciliation is an essential part of reconciliation itself. Programs of reconciliation are carried out during the readjustment phase, where the reconstruction of society begins. RTCYPP is a work in progress. Building bonds of relationship with those considered "the other" is the ultimate goal of all dialogues. Such bonds however are not built quickly, therefore, patience and perseverance are crucial in the practice of dialogue. The tenacity to go on, even when the fruits are not obvious, is one of the basic disciplines of dialogue.

In times of conflict, religious believers from different faiths often find that they have more in common with one another than they have with non-religious people from their own background. Moucarry argues that God´s attributes in Islam and Christianity are closer than many of us has realized. The interfaith dialogue in Cyprus takes place in concrete settings.

RTCYPP´s awareness of such realities as historical experience, economic background and political ideologies is essential. The purpose of dialogue, once the context is taken seriously, is not to remove or run away from differences but to build confidence and trust across them.

4.3.6. To address public issues of moral concern

In some parts of the world, such as in Cyprus and in other parts of the Middle East, there is a role of religion in public life that requires an understanding and cooperation among religions. Religious leaders are being called by governmental and non-governmental agencies to address public issues of moral concern. However, to speak collectively and with moral authority, religious communities must discern their common values, decide to what extent they can express themselves with one voice, and discuss how they can avoid being manipulated by political forces.

The religious leaders have visited the Anthropological laboratory of the Committee on Missing Persons (CMP), in order to express their unanimous support to the Committee's bi-communal humanitarian work. They appealed to the public that people who have knowledge of whereabouts of possible burial sites should be encouraged to speak. By making the cause humanitarian with a focus on peace, truth and reconciliation, the religious leaders could, in their joint appeal, overcome the political barrier and look at the shared pain of both communities.

The theoretical recommendations for how religion could be effective in peacebuilding can be demonstrated by the two joint statements, signed by the religious leaders in Cyprus. If it's the right time, it can be very powerful. It all depends on the context and the issue. But in a peace building process it´s also a risk that is watering down beliefs in order to find commonality and reach agreement.

The joint statements express the religious leaders united voice against all forms of attack, terrorism and violence in Cyprus, the region and the world at large. In addition, they commit to work together for human rights and peace in Cyprus. The religious leaders stress that the dialogue they have experienced together has strengthen their conviction that there is no future without tolerance, mutual understanding, respect and peaceful coexistence. The strength of setting the agenda together lies in the fact that all partners own the agenda and become committed to making it work. For the conduct of dialogue, clear objectives and commonly agreed criteria for participation and regular assessment are essential.

One of the pillars, that has involved RTCYPP as an active peacebuilder, is to ensure the protection of religious monuments and advocate for the right to access and worship. If one is able to join the other in his or her own practices, this sends a powerful message not only of acceptance, but also of a deep recognition and appreciation, of the other´s faith. Such messages are effective in preventing violence and exclusion. These activities are so called "confidence building measures", and promote grassroots living in the villages. In this way, RTCYPP strives to ensure that dialogue takes place at different levels between different groups and on subjects that affect the lives of all sections of the community.

4.3.7. Partnership between human rights and religious peacebuilding

The basis of RTCYPP is the human rights framework in general, and the framework of freedom of religion in particular. The concept of religious peacebuilding, according to Wang, infuses the religious sphere with the political sphere. RTCYPP means to change structures of society which legitimate the conflict, such as unequal power relations and lack of freedom of movement. The interfaith dialogue aims to achieving justice, spreading peace and defending human rights.

Religion is just one actor and one factor in a much wider project of strategic peacebuilding in Cyprus. It is difficult to disaggregate religion from other factors in peacebuilding. Religious peacebuilders rarely act alone. Successful religious peacebuilding usually involves collaboration with other civil society actors, governments, and international institutions. RTCYPP has to draw upon solid cooperation and support of the political authorities, the good services of the United Nations, the office of the Secretary General's representative and United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).

I asked whether RTCYPP is capable of reaching the public sphere with their voices for peace. The research questions used are "In what ways could an interfaith dialogue, prove to play a positive role in addressing violations of human rights?" and "How do Muslim and Christian believers contribute to peace, forgiveness and reconciliation in the Middle East, focused on Cyprus?" Based on my studies, I believe that the ability of forming a voice within the public sphere is a question of power and influence. The religious leaders in Cyprus are capable of reaching the public sphere to a certain extent. Interfaith dialogue is good to the degree to which it helps generate good relationships that lead to good deeds, and this in turn will lead to peace and justice.

The purpose of the RTCYPP is to build relationship, understanding and trust between the religious leaders in Cyprus. This study has shown that the inter-religious communication in Cyprus offer constructive contributions to the peace process. However, the situation of human rights in Cyprus today remain unsatisfactory as long as the Cyprus conflict has not reached a political solution. Based on this reality, I believe, the religious leaders will continue their peacebuilding efforts and strive together for a reunited Cyprus where all Cypriots can live together in peaceful coexistence and where the rights of all are respected.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis I seek to give a limited answer to the question "In what ways an interfaith dialogue proves to play a positive role in addressing violations of human rights" and "How Muslim and Christian believers contribute to peace, forgiveness and reconciliation in the Middle East, focused on Cyprus".

In order to answer these questions, I have studied the historical development and the identity of Christianity and Islam in the Middle East, as well as the theory of interfaith dialogue and religious peacebuilding, to clarify the peace-making force in religion and its partnership with human rights.

The study establishes that it is important to understand the collective religious past, and the focus on dialogue and interreligious understanding is necessary for creating a culture of peace in the Middle East. Religious identity is a powerful source in shaping attitudes and actions in a conflict zone.

An interfaith dialogue is similar to dialogue initiatives carried out in a secular context. However, certain unique features in an interfaith dialogue setting differ. The spiritual, moral, and ethical components of any religious identity are powerful sources for generating change.

Interfaith dialogue is a difficult endeavour. It brings no guarantee of success, and should not be attempted without careful preparation and a clearly defined purpose. The studies also illuminate its possibilities. Interfaith dialogue can enhance mutual understanding, foster joint activities, and even transform relationships between members of conflicting groups. Religious peacebuilding often suffers from a paradox: the more religion is central to a conflict, the greater the need for interfaith dialogue; the less religion is central to the conflict, the greater the likelihood that interfaith dialogue will bear fruit.

The study has shown that religious peacebuilding usually has one or more of five purposes: deepening relationships, improving understanding, finding common ground on beliefs and issues, promoting common action, and encouraging complementary action. Each goal is worthy in itself, but a strategic approach to interfaith dialogue and religious peacebuilding defines the purpose of a particular initiative in light of the nature of the conflict, the theory of change underlying the engagement, and the actors involved.

This research can be summarized in some guiding principles to be used in the process of interfaith dialogue:

- Dialogue must be a process of mutual empowerment, not a negotiation between parties who have conflicting interests and claims. Rather than being bound by the constraints of power relations, partners in dialogue should be empowered to join a common pursuit of justice, peace and constructive action for the good of all people. In dialogue we strive toward mutual respect.
- In dialogue we grow in faith. For Christians and Muslims, involvement in dialogue produces constant reappraisal of our understanding of the theological tradition. Dialogue drives all communities to self-criticism and to re-thinking the ways in which they have interpreted their faith traditions. It is of importance to understand the collective religious past, and to respect the integrity of religious traditions in the variety of their structures.
- In dialogue we affirm hope. In the midst of the many divisions, conflicts and violence there is hope that it is possible to create a human community that lives in justice and peace. Dialogue is not an end in itself. It is a means of building bridges of respect and understanding.
- Dialogue is a co-operative and collaborative activity, and strives to be inclusive. The process should aim at building relationships. Successful dialogue can help the opposing sides to move away from a cycle of revenge.

As stated above, Christians and Muslims are called to engage in genuine dialogue, urging them to relate to each other with true humility and respect. Dialogue is a mission that calls for getting to know the other and accepting them, aimed at achieving justice, spreading peace and defending human rights.

The future . . .

This thesis emphasizes that focusing on dialogue and interreligious understanding is necessary for creating a culture of peace in the Middle East. The region is in need of a nonviolent religious resistance movement. It is of importance to organize a regional network in order to coordinate the interfaith activities, and to exchange experience. The interfaith dialogue work should be linked to existing local and regional social networks, in fields like human rights advocacy. Organisations would build capacity in the field of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. To expand the outreach of such organisations to a wider audience should be a priority. Activities that include youth in these efforts should be increased.

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7. Appendices

7.1.   Field visits

As a starting point of my work with the following thesis, I visited, in February, the refugee camps in Lebanon and in March, Israel/Palestine. These two contexts are examples of how people are suffering because of conflicts in the Middle East. A report on the field visits is provided in an appendix.

7.1.1. A visit to Lebanon´s Bekaa valley

My visit to the refugee camps in Lebanon´s Bekaa valley helped me got a greater understanding of the life that refugees are forced to live. It was an instructive and productive visit. I note that no one leaves such a context unaffected!

Some children are simply being left behind. *"I wanted to be an engineer before,"* nine year-old Ahmed, told me. But after three years out of school because of the conflict, he has almost no hope of catching up again.

The refugee camp of Ablah, Bekaa valley, Lebanon (photos; Irén Frändå and SAT-7)

"When we lived in Syria, before the war, we were very happy but living in this situation is better than living in the middle of a war and all the fighting. Here at least I feel the children are safe", Mustafa said.

"I don´t have any activities during the day. The only thing I have now is to write and draw when I have a notebook and pens. When I was in Syria my day was filled with going to school and being with my friends. I loved school. I loved studying. I loved my teachers and I loved my friends. I miss it very much. Here I don´t know anybody", Sami explained.

This little school bag was very valuable to a boy in the camp. He held it tight, in order not to lose it. He hopes to go back to school again, and then, of course, the bag will be used.

As 15 million people spend the winter in miserable conditions, as refugees or internally displaced persons, more than ever they are in need of FAITH, HOPE and LOVE.

The refugee camp of Zahle, Bekaa valley, Lebanon
(Photos; Irén Frändå)

7.1.2. A visit to the Holy Land Israel/Palestine

To visit the Old City of Jerusalem, drink a cup of coffee, relax, watch and be fascinated by how history, faith, and culture commingle here as perhaps nowhere else on earth, is unforgettable. Jerusalem is the holy ground for the three great monotheistic religions, whose numbers embrace half the world´s population. Jerusalem´s Old City is home to some of the most sacred sites of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: the Western Wall, the Temple Mount/Haram esh-Sharif, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque. Some travellers visit them to find their soul, others to seek a sense of communion with ancient epochs. I was there to study how the three religions can live so close to each other but still be so separated.

View over the Old City in Jerusalem. To the left Redeemer Church and to the right the Dome of the Rock.

Jerusalem is one city under God that composites three faith-civilizations; Jewish, Christian, and Muslim. They cohabit the Old City uneasily, burdened by centuries of struggle with each other for rights and real estate. But at the level of day-to-day routine, each draws its adherents to, respectively, the Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. To the visitor the collage of spiritual traditions is of the bewildering, sometimes alien, always fascinating.

Moreover, I attended a conference in Bethlehem, called "Christ at the Checkpoint 4 – the Gospel in the face of religious extremism". In the Middle East, religious extremism and violence is on the rise, and religious minorities are paying a heavy price. At the conference, the importance of building bridges of friendship with our neighbours was discussed.

Thousands of Palestinians from Bethlehem cross the checkpoint every morning to work in Israel. For most, that means a very early start every morning as it takes hours of lining up, waiting, crowding through narrow passageways, and security checks. The only way to understand is to see for yourself. I went there and walked along the wall to observe the checkpoint. It was a challenge to face this injustice, disrespect, inequality, etc.

Between the terminal and the gate to the Bethlehem side. Palestinians waiting for passage to the Jerusalem side, in the morning.

7.2. Joint Statement of the Religious Leaders of Cyprus

7.2.1. Joint Statement of the Religious Leaders of Cyprus, against all forms of attacks, terrorism and violence

24 November 2015

We, the religious leaders of the five main faith communities of Cyprus, Greek Orthodox, Muslim, Armenian Orthodox, Maronite and Latin Catholic, who form the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process under the Auspices of the Embassy of Sweden, committed and working all together for human rights and peace in Cyprus, express our united voice against all forms of attacks, terrorism and violence in our country, region and the world at large.

United in one voice we reiterate that as religious leaders we pray first and foremost for all victims everywhere, their families and friends and with all those who are mourning all over the world.

We are horrified to see the increased appalling violence against innocent civilians in our region and beyond, with victims including children, women and the elderly. Growing numbers of refugees from our region are risking their lives daily, facing hostilities, rejection and death. We are with them in deep compassion and prayer.

We categorically condemn all forms of violence against innocent civilians. No war, no act of terrorism, atrocities or violent attacks against innocent people can be justified in the name of God Almighty or any religion or humanity. War begets war. Violence begets violence. All people of good will must stand together to respect, support and care for one another. Violence in the name of God is violence against religion itself.

As religious leaders we have a responsibility not only to speak out and work united against all forms of violence but also understand and address diligently the root causes that lead to such conflicts, violence and wars and to always promote and protect peace.

Our sacred texts call us not only to combat injustice but also to uplift the poorest in our midst. Where inequality is entrenched, instability and conflict are far more likely to erupt. Inspired by our shared values we embrace the moral imperative to reach out to the most vulnerable among us, uphold human dignity and advocate for human rights.

The dialogue we have experienced together has strengthened our conviction that there is no future without tolerance, mutual understanding, respect and peaceful co- existence.

With our different identities we have to be together as one human family, as people of every faith or none. We have a responsibility to preach, act and show that our shared respect for human life and dignity is stronger than evil acts of terror, and perversion of religion.

Together we reaffirm the need to all uphold democratic, intercultural and human rights values that have been attacked recently in Ankara, Sinai, Beirut, Paris, Yola and Bamako.

Let us recommit our care and hospitality to those fleeing violence, oppression and war.

Let us be compassionate and walk humbly with our God on the way of love, mercy, justice and peace.

Signatories:

H.B Chrysostomos II, Archbishop of Nova Justiniana and All Cyprus, H.E Dr Talip Atalay, Mufti of Cyprus, H.E. Nareg, Archbishop of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church of Cyprus, H.E. Yousef Soueif, Archbishop of the Maronite Church of Cyprus, Rev Father Jerzy Kraj, Latin Patriarchal Vicar and Representative of the Apostolic Nunciature in Cyprus

7.2.2. Joint Statement on the Resumption of Peace Talks

February 26, 2014

As religious leaders of Cyprus, we warmly welcome the joint communique of the political leaders of the two communities.

We are encouraged by the joint message of the political leaders that the status quo is unacceptable, that human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as each other´s distinct identity and integrity should be respected. We welcome their expressed determination to resume negotiations in a result- oriented manner. We expect them to reach a settlement as set out in the joint communique of February 11 2014 and support our efforts to build confidence.

Cyprus has centuries′ long experience of Christians and Muslims living, working and worshipping side by side in harmony.

Religion was and still is a victim of the protracted conflict. For too many decades we were not able to meet, to listen and to understand each other. For the last years we have agreed to meet regularly, openly express our respect and listen to one another. Our encounters have helped us to get to know each other and understand the other's needs. Together we have tried to find practical solutions, build trust and confidence and succeeded.

We see our responsibility to ensure that the political conflict is resolved and we believe that there is no alternative to communication, co-operation and co-existence.

Working together, seeking to overcome differences and supporting each other are obligations for people of faith and tools to promote faith when there is doubt, love where there is hatred and hope to overcome despair.

Our faith in God is our hope. It is to Him we turn. For nothing is impossible with God.

Signatories:

H.B Chrysostomos II, Archbishop of Nova Justiniana and All Cyprus, H.E Dr Talip Atalay, Mufti of Cyprus, H.E. Varoujan Herkelian, Archbishop of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church of Cyprus, H.E. Yousef Soueif, Archbishop of the Maronite Church of Cyprus, Rev Father Jerzy Kraj, Latin Patriarchal Vicar and Representative of the Apostolic Nunciature in Cyprus